

**From Aesgaard to Zingara,
with all of Robert E. Howard's
rich panoply of Hyperborea
in between!**

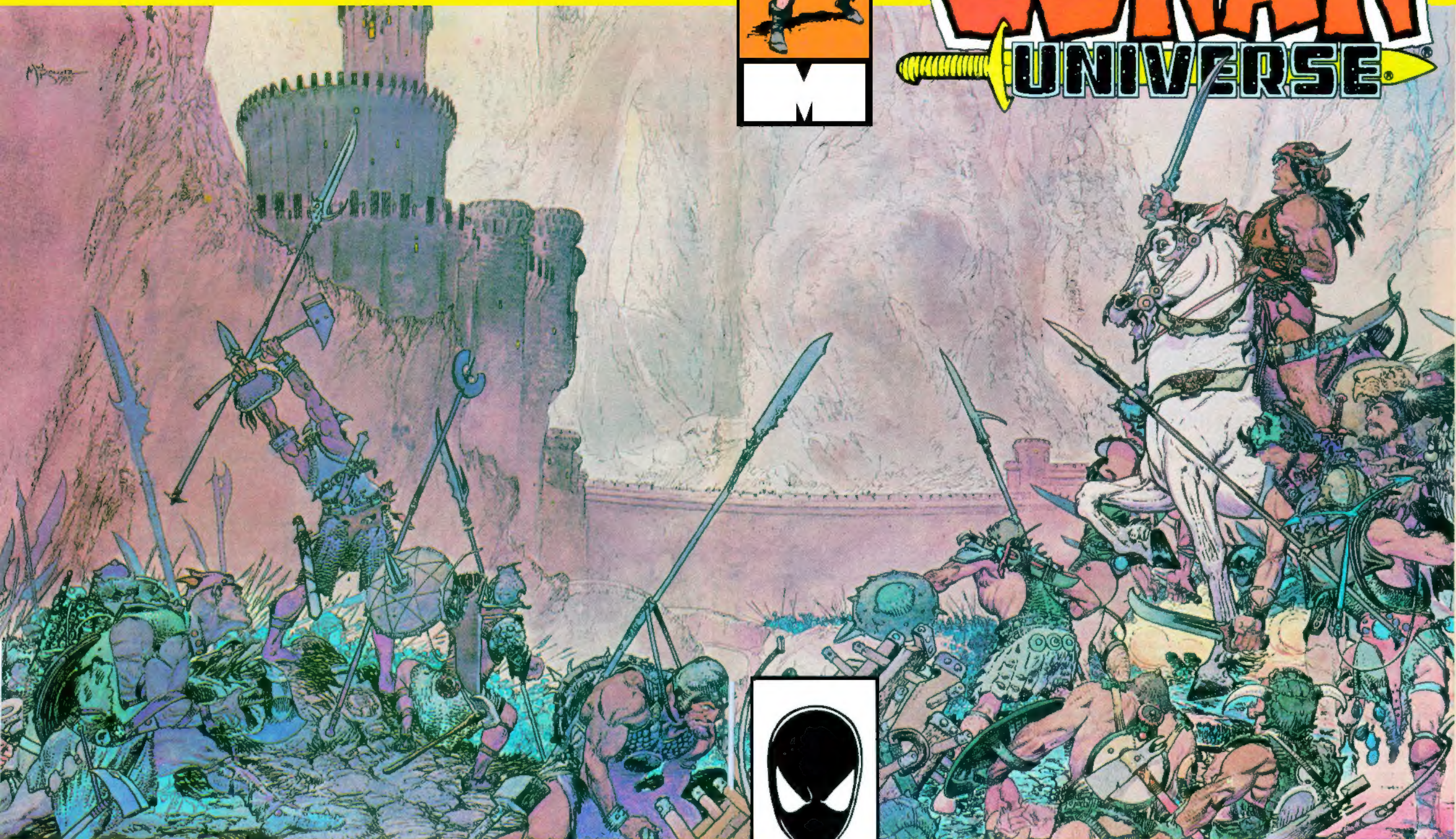
MARVEL



THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE

CONAN

UNIVERSE



ROBERT ERVIN HOWARD



*"My dreams are laid in cold, giant lands . . .
inhabited by savages."*

It is more than fifty years since a shy, moody young loner named Robert Howard dreamed beyond the oaks and hills of Cross Plains, Texas, his home; dreamed and imagined the timelost worlds of a mythical, unhistoried past when humankind knew many gods, and mighty men slew monsters in the night, and jeweled kingdoms rose and fell by bloody blades and the dark whisperings of sorcerers.

His neighbors must have scratched their heads, as neighbors will in small towns, and wondered when the Howard boy would grow up, get hisself a real job "steed o' this what-chacallit, freelance writin'?" How should they know that Doc Howard's precocious introvert of a son was just then changing the face of popular fiction forever, creating CONAN and fashioning the sword and sorcery heroic fantasy into art? Only afterwards, when the god was cold on the young man's grave, folks might remember back and say, "Bob Howard? Heck, the kid was a born storyteller."

A born storyteller, a natural, no doubt of it, and he gave us CONAN. Conan the Barbarian. Conan the adventurer and swordsman, lover and brawler, corsair and kozak and king. Conan, who wandered the HYBORIAN AGE, an imaginary epoch some 12,000 years ago our time, between the legendary sinking of Atlantis and the beginning of recorded history. The Hyborian Age, a forgotten shadow-era of barbarism and decadent civilizations, before the continents took their present shape, before science was or technology, when heroes fought vil-

lains for damsels fair, when magic was real and demons only waited summons, when codes of honor and codes of revenge settled all men's scores.

The tales have outlived their creator by one year short of fifty now, and their popularity is ever on the rise. Conan the Barbarian — in prose and pastiche, comic book and strip, even in the movies — is currently entertaining an audience numbered in the millions. It is for these that this guide to Howard's Conan universe, as interpreted over the last fifteen years by MARVEL COMICS, has been prepared. Here readers will find, in alphabetical array, the backgrounds of the Hyborian Age from AES-GAARD to ZINGARA. Weapons of Conan's day are faithfully rendered, gods reverently described, the saga succinctly summarized.

The Conan Universe. It's a handy reference and a good browse, but, most important, a real tribute to that young south-westerner who dreamed it all more than fifty years gone.

THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE
CONAN
UNIVERSE

AESGAARD

"The golden-haired Aesir are wayward and fierce . . ."

A far-northern nation comprising the eastern portion of Nordheim, Aesgaard is home of the blond-haired, blue-eyed Aesir, a virile and rough-hewn race of hunters and axe-wielding warriors who fight by day and carouse by night. The Aesir live in tribal units. Though each tribe has its own king, who presides in a timber-rooted Great Hall, all Aesir worship the same god, Ymir, the Frost Giant. The terrain of Aesgaard is rugged, with high snowcapped mountains to the north, forest in the southern lowlands, and tundra between. The land supports musk ox and mammoth, moose, fox, and snow bear among other native creatures. These, along with wild fruits, are the primary sustenance of the Aesir, who practice neither agriculture nor herding. Aesgaard may have formed an informal alliance with Cimmeria to the south, but Vanaheim to the west and Hyperborea to the east remain ancient and hated foes.



AFGHULISTAN

"Untamed tribesmen haunt her hills"

A region of the southwestern Himalayan Mountain Range, Afghulistan is home of the Afghulii outlaw tribe who live in villages ruled by headmen. The fierceness of the tribesmen as fighters has given rise to the proverb, "A perilous road to Afghulistan." Among other weapons, the Afghulii hillmen use the tulwar and the yard-long Zhaibar knife. The land of Afghulistan comprises only the southwestern portion of Ghulistan, while Ghulistan proper refers to the larger region inhabited by mountain tribes of the southern Himalayan Mountains. These other tribes of Greater Ghulistan include the Gatzai, the Wazuli, the Zhaibarli, and the Khurakzai, the latter possibly a branch of the Afghulii themselves.

THE HANDBOOK OF THE CONAN® UNIVERSE, Vol. 1, No. 1, January, 1986. Published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, James E. Galt, President, Stan Lee, Publisher, Michael Hobson, Group Vice-President, Milton Schifman, Vice-President, Production, OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 357 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016. Copyright © 1985 by Conan Properties, Inc. CONAN THE BARBARIAN (including all prominent characters featured in this issue) and the distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks of Conan Properties, Inc. RED SONJA is a trademark of Red Sonja Corporation. KULL is a trademark of Kull Productions, Inc. All rights reserved. Price \$1.25 per copy in the U.S. and \$1.50 in Canada. Printed in the U.S.A. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition.

Westernmost and foremost of the Hyborian kingdoms of Conan's day, Aquilonia rules "supreme in the western world," a commercial and military giant with a high level of civilization, lacking only, perhaps, the richer cultural diversity of its major rival, Nemedia. The most important provinces of the country are Pottain, the southernmost, a beautiful region of sunny meadowlands, rolling plains, rose gardens, orange groves, and palm trees; Attalus, in the southeast, a barony whose nobles claimed descent from Aquilonia's ancient royalty while presiding over an area of advanced commerce and culture; and Gunderland, a northern province bordering on Cimmaria and isolated from the rest of Aquilonia by woodlands rife with wild bears, wolves, and aurochs. Gunderland was once a separate principality before its folk assented to incorporation within greater Aquilonia. The Gundermen are more primitively Hyborian, and their greediest concession at the time of alliance with Aquilonia was their adoption of Mitra worship in place of that of ancient Ilfort. They are a rude, hardy people with tawny hair, grey eyes, and tall, sturdy frames. Gundermen are outstanding soldiers who, as pikemen and spearmen, form the backbone of the Aquilonian infantry, though nominal vassals to their adopted homeland does not deter them from hiring out as mercenaries to the armies of Zamora and Shem as well, for example.

The Westmarck is an important Aquilonian frontier region located between the Bossonian Marches and the Pictish Wilderness, and consisting of several provinces including Cenavaga, the largest and most thickly settled; Scholtira, the smallest; Orskone, the least populous; and Thundara, the southernmost and most purely pioneer province, marked by manned forts and ruled by an elected military commander. Though there is almost constant warfare between the pioneers of the Westmarck and the native Picts of the wilderness, nonetheless colonizers are ever arriving because of the shortage of good farmland in the interior, where the great lords of Aquilonia have sequestered so much of the cropland for personal use as privileged hunting preserves. Other provinces in Aquilonia include the Tauran, a land of open groves and pastures, whose citizens dwell in picturesque thatched cottages and hunt native deer; Couthen, Manera, Thura, Ramen, Karaban, and the baronies of Torr, Amilus, Lor, and Imirus. On a plain not far from the Khorotas River, surrounded by fertile lands and lying on the Road of Kings — the famed Hyborian east to west highway and trade route — is Tarantia, the walled capital of Aquilonia and largest city of the realm. Renowned as a commercial center and site of the elaborate royal palace of blue and golden towers, Tarantia is called the "most princely city of the West," though here, too, is located the grim Iron Tower, a notorious prison.

Aquilonia is overall a land of pleasant temperate climate. Its people are a proud race, tall in frame and varied in complexion. They are steadfast in their devotion to the god Mitra, whose service requires refined rituals and forbids human sacrifice. In matters of war, the Aquilonians put their trust in heavily-armed cavalry and a strong infantry. Their pikemen and spearmen are largely from Gunderland, while Bossonians, chief archers of the day, fill the ranks of the bowman. The imperial troops are known as the Black Legions, while the king's personal bodyguard goes under the epithet of the Black Dragons.

During the reign of King Conan I, the court at Tarantia was a center of romance, adventure, wisdom, wealth, and wit. A copy of a court portrait surviving in the Chronicles offers a rare glimpse of those personalities who made up the royal inner circle: King Conan, Queen Zenobia, and their children, Prince Conri, Princess Radebunt, and Prince Taurus; Councilor Publus, a man of plans rather than action; Count Trocero of Pottain, viceroy of Aquilonia; Prospero of Pottain, the king's right-hand man and confidante; Alcemides, court philosopher; Dexitheus, High Priest of Mitra; and General Pallentides, commander of the Black Dragons.

*"Mightiest kingdom of the West,
proudest kingdom of the world"*

AQUILONIA



AQUILONIA — THE ROYAL CASTLE AND DEMESNE

The castle of King Conan was a fortified dwelling surrounded by thick walls and battlements patrolled by Borssonian archers as well as watchmen, armed with halberd and sword, who could see for miles. A barbican, a small fort or exterior gatehouse, led to a drawbridge over a ditch. Crossing the bridge brought one to the inner gatehouse which was defended by an iron portcullis and double doors. Beyond these doors lay the outer ward or bailey, a large open area where were to be found the servants' quarters, stables, falcon mews, boar pits, dovecotes, haystacks, wells, forges, a fish pond, grazing sheep, and arbors of fruit trees. An interior wall surrounded the keep, the strongest part of the castle, housing the quarters of the royal family. A gate in the inner wall led through an inner ward to the keep itself. In the inner ward were located the kitchen sheds, bakehouse, and ovens, as well as private gardens. In the keep proper were the royal bedchambers, a chapel of Mitra, sewing and embroidery rooms, audience halls and a throne room, a great hall for feasting, dungeons, storerooms, and wine cellars. Surrounding the castle is the king's demesne, private forest and countryside full of deer and boar, sheep and wolf, as well as smaller game and wild vegetables, all belonging to the king.



"To Argos and the sea!"

ARGOS

Among the greatest commercial nations of the Hyborian Age, Argos is renowned for its maritime industry, master shipmen, and short, stocky sailors, these last reputedly the best in all the world. Centrally located on the Western Ocean between Zingara and Stygia, its sea-faring rivals, Argos dominates coastwise trade. Its own coast is a glittering array of cosmopolitan cities and feigning ports from which merchant ships sail south to Kush and the Black Kingdoms, where the Argosians trade beads, silks, sugar, and brass-hilted swords for ivory, copper ore, slaves, and pearls. The largest, richest port city of all, and capital of Argos, is Massania. Here begins the Road of Kings, a major Hyborian highway running eastward to Turan, and here flows an endless stream of river traffic from Aquilonia, Nemedia, and Ohlrik. Here, too, smugglers and pirates find fences for ill-gained wares, giving added meaning to the proverbial saw that "All sea-ways lead to Massania." In fact, there is reason to believe that Argos tacitly provides the notorious Barathan pirates cash subsidies and unofficial use of port facilities in exchange for granting Argosian vessels free passage on the open sea while mercilessly harrying the shipping of rival Zingara. North of the bustling coastal cities are the inland provinces of Argos, culturally backward and of minor economic importance.



ARMS AND ARMOR

"Knights and horses in battle array . . . maces, swords, and helms of brilliant hues"



As in later historical times, weapons of the Hyborian Age were divided into two fundamental categories, offensive and defensive, the former designed to extend a man's reach against his foe, the latter to ward off his opponent's blows. Although arms and armor were basically a soldier's concern, the pervasive lawlessness and decadence of the period guaranteed that any wise man—and many a shrewd woman—would own several hand weapons to protect his home, family, and person. Most popular and common of these were the sword and a variety of knives, daggers, and dirks. Swords came in all manner of sizes and shapes from short-swords and cutlasses to two-handed swords, dueling swords, war-swords, and broad-swords nearly four feet in length with bulky blades; the baselard, a short sword or long dagger; and the falchion, a long cleaver-like sword with a thick blade and a curved cutting edge were also much

in use, though mostly as knightly weapons. Iron sword blades were tempered and hammered to steel, and the finished weapon was carried in a scabbard. A sword was held by the hilt and sometimes protected by guards. A pommel, or knob at the end of the hilt, was often used to give the blade proper balance. National variations of the sword existed, such as the tulwar, shamshir, and saber, but all served the same purposes—to cut, to slash, to thrust, and to kill.

Warriors, of course, used the widest range of weapons, which varied for the knights, or mounted cavalry, and the infantry, or foot-soldiers. Once the Hyborians had developed stirrups, attached to the horse's saddle by leather straps, knights were able to do combat on horseback without losing their balance and falling. Because of their firmness in the saddle, the knights were able to carry the weight of protective armor. Chain mail armor of interlocking steel rings was

most common, some suits adding protective plates of metal at the elbow and knee, while some Hyborian heavy cavalry may have worn whole suits of steel plate. Though a basic suit of mail, called a harness, was not as heavy as popularly believed—it weighed not much more than the pack and gear of a modern infantryman—it was clumsy to get into, hence the need of a squire to assist his master knight by laying out the armor in sequence. A typical dressing in harness would go as follows: linen hose, breeches, and a long-sleeved woolen shirt were put on as undergarments and, over these, a leather tunic or quilted jerkin was worn to prevent chafing of the shoulders by the coat of mail. On top of this came the mail itself, called the hauberk, with full-length sleeves ending in mittens of mail, or gauntlets, designed with palm slits for freeing the hands. In warm weather a surcoat over the mail kept the sun from over-heating

the armor, while in cold weather a fur-lined cloak kept the knight comfortable. Mail overleggings were called chausses, and a mail helmet worn over the head and down over neck and shoulders was called a coif. Various padded helmets were worn over the coif from simple steel caps with nose-guards to full-face helms or heaumes. High crests might be worn on helmets to identify a knight above the battle. Rusty mail armor was cleaned by rolling it about in a barrel filled with small stones and coarse sand.

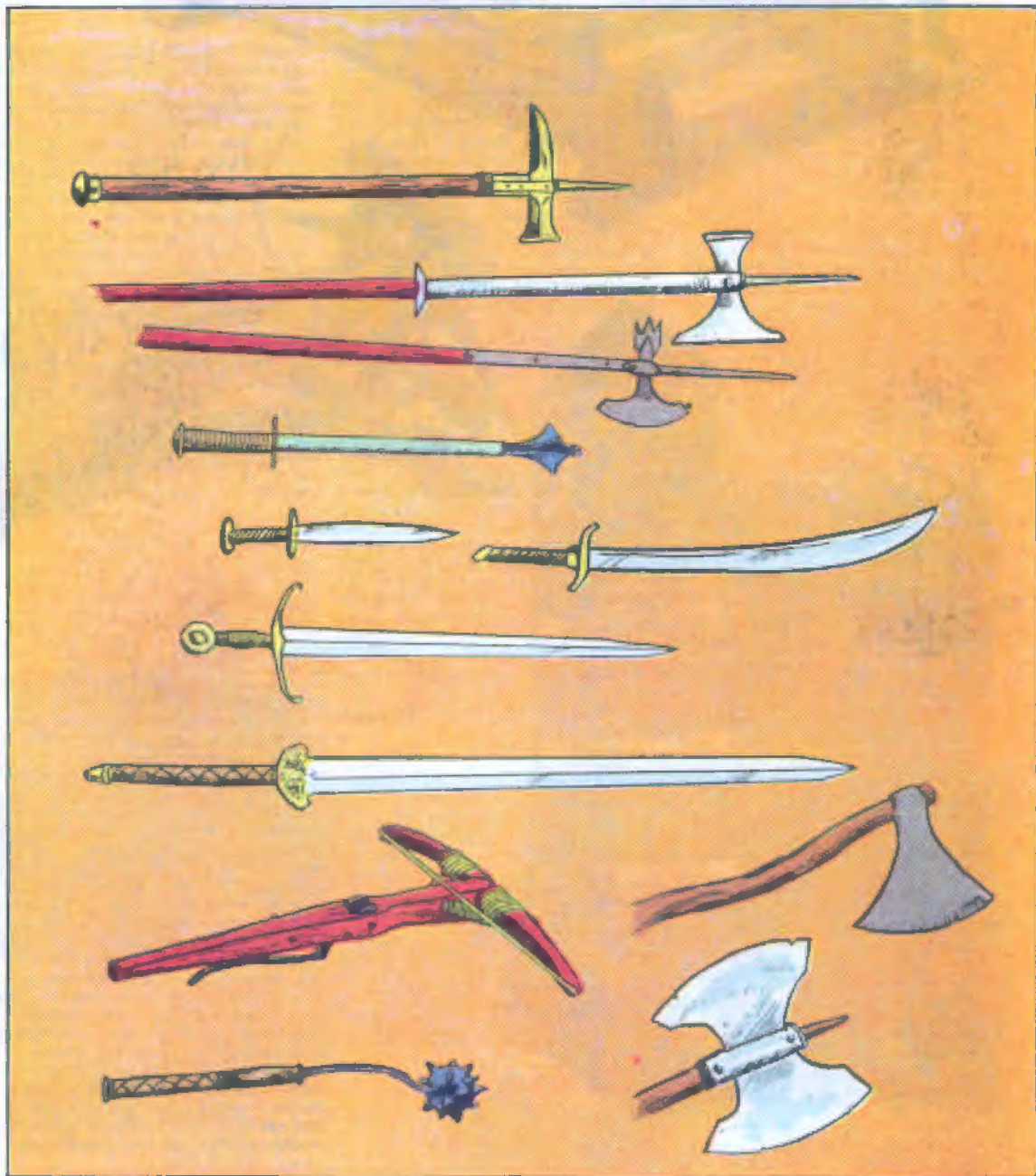
The knight's hand weapons included sword and lance, as well as the battle-axe and war club, the spiked, iron-headed mace, and war-flail, or morningstar, a variation of the mace swinging on a length of chain. The knight's war-horse, or destrier, was an im-

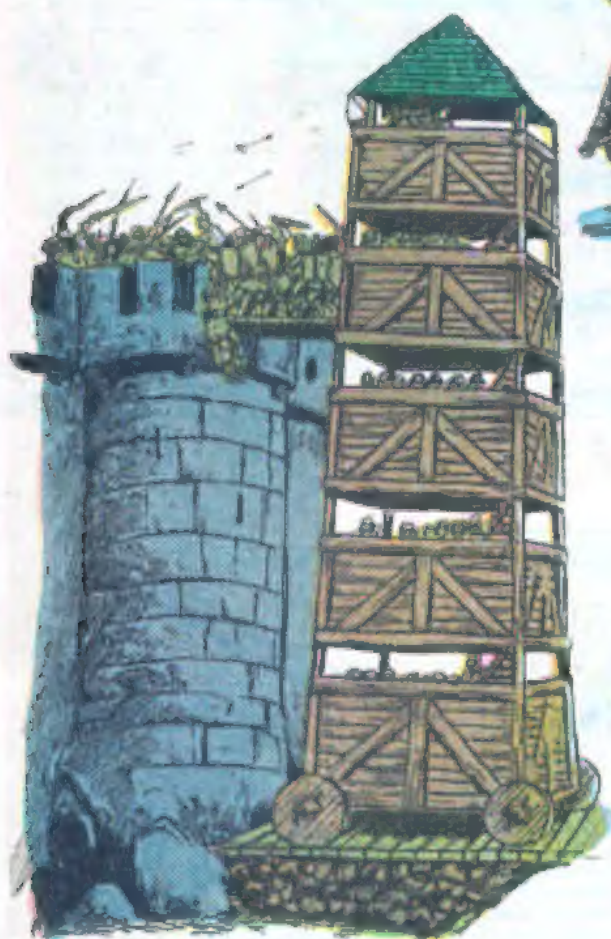
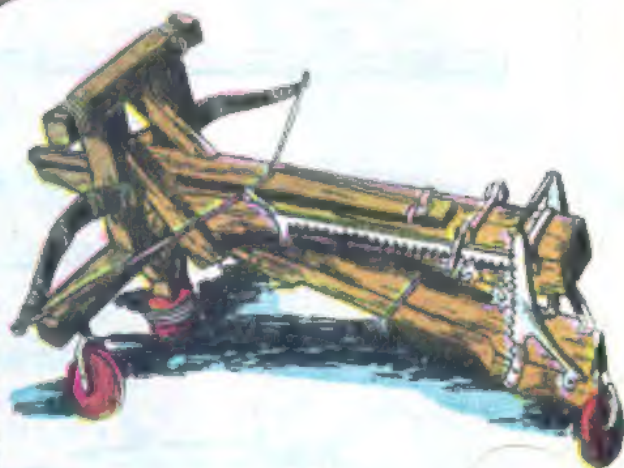
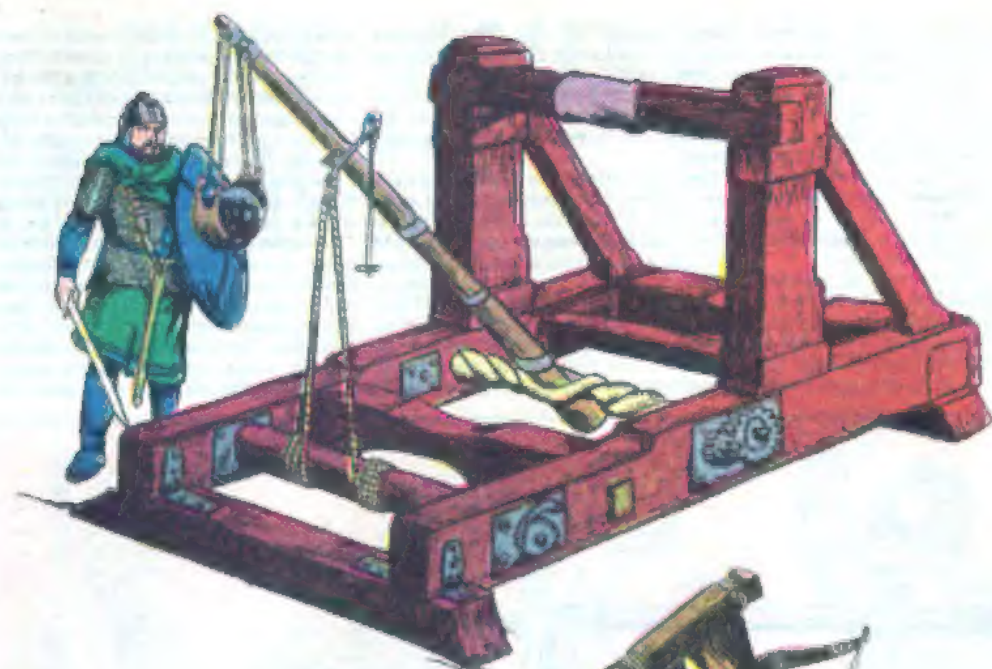
portant weapon at times. These horses often wore sharpened shoes and reared up on their haunches to beat at the foe about them with their forefeet. But metal spikes called caltrops could be thrown onto the battlefield to disable the fearless war-horses.

The main weapons for infantrymen were bow and arrow and pole arms. The short bow had a range of about fifty yards while the more powerful longbow quadrupled that distance, as did the crossbow. The longbow had the advantage of speed over the crossbow, which required to be drawn by foot and stimp, but the crossbow possessed greater accuracy. Longbow arrows, or clothyards, had metal heads, while crossbow arrows were of wood or iron and called

bolts or quarrels. Pole arms, used to break up cavalry charges and in close fighting, included pikes — spears as long as twenty-two feet (the severed heads of traitors were often displayed on these); long-handled bills for lopping off limbs; the poleax, a battle-axe on a pole; the halberd, a poleax with a longer spear and a crescent-shaped blade; the or-longue, a spear with a two-edged blade; and the glaive, a big knife-blade on a pole.

Hybonian siege weaponry and missile engines included battering rams; javelin-shooting catapults and ballistas; mangonels and trip-gates that pitched stones; portable fighting towers and a variety of ladders, or escalades. For defense, besiegers used the mantlet, a large portable wooden screen propped on the ground to give cover, and





the pavise, an over-sized shield held by a soldier to protect an archer while he shot.

Among the non-Hyborian peoples of the age, distinctive weaponry and modes of fighting developed. Standard arms among the barbarian tribes were sword, spear, and shield. A barbarian wife presented her husband a gift of arms at marriage, and he carried them with him always, even to council meetings. Among the Stygians, chariots were used in war. Horses were yoked to the wagon, and quivers for arrows and javelins were tied to the chariot body. In the Black Kingdoms, armor consisted often of quilted ponchos covered with leopard skins and helmets of basketwork or hard crocodile skin. Barbed spears and bows were used for fighting as well as hunting. Short swords were common for hand-to-hand combat, while throwing irons with spikes sticking out in all directions were used from a distance. Rhinoceros horn clubs and shields of elephant or hippopotamus hide were also popular. Finally, the men of Kithai in the Far East used a powerful composite bow made of wood, split horn, and dried animal sinews.

"Veiled in the mists
of legendry . . ."

ATLANTIS

AND THE PRE-CATACLYSMIC AGE



The Pre-Cataclysmic Age is an imaginary period that began about 100,000 years ago with the rise of Thurian civilization and ended when the Great Cataclysm, a geological upheaval, rocked the world and transformed the face of the globe some 8,000 years before the Hyborian Age of Conan. At that time, Atlantis was a small continent of wilderness and barbarian tribes that lay out on the Western Ocean between the Pictish Isles and the mainland of Thuria, the major world continent of the Pre-Cataclysmic Age. When the Great Cataclysm struck, Atlantis was devastated and completely swallowed by the ocean, its mysterious doom and disappearance gave rise to an unparalleled body of prehistoric fable, myth, and legend, out of all proportion to the relatively minor role Atlantis played on the world scene of its day. It is for this reason that the period is often referred to as the "Age of Atlantis," though in actuality the civilized nations of the mainland, known collectively as the Seven Empires of Thuria, more clearly dominated the politics and history of the day.

The Atlanteans were warriors and hunters, and Witch Kings ruled their tribes. A plucky, barbaric people, they had as motto, "Atlantis is the foe of all men," and, indeed, their enemies included not only the civilized kingdoms, but contemporary barbarian nations as well—the Folk of the Isles, the Picts, who dwell on the Pictish Islands, or Isles of Sunset, far out on the ocean to the west beyond Atlantis, and the Lemurians, savage pirates who inhabited a large chain of islands, later destroyed by the Great Cataclysm, in the ocean east of the Thurian continent.

The civilized nations of the Pre-Cataclysmic Age, though great in extent, nonetheless occupied a relatively small part of the whole world while vast regions remained unexplored. Valusia, the Land of Enchantment, was the westernmost and most ancient of the fabulous Seven Empires. This pre-Atlantean kingdom was doubtless the richest, most sophisticated, and greatest nation of its day, and perhaps the most decadent. Its exotic capital was known as the Crystal City or City of Wonders, and it was said that a man could spend a whole lifetime there and not explore half its marvels and mysteries. Prior to human rule the land of Valusia belonged to a horrid Elder Race of serpent-folk. True men, ancestors of the Valusians, came from the East, crossed the Camoonian Desert and the Hills of Zalgar, and conquered the snake-people. Still, a few of the evil brood survived and went into hiding, essaying forth now and then in bloody attempts to regain their lost power.

Easternmost of the Seven Empires was Grondar, a shadowy land whose dark people were less highly cultured than the Valusians. The five remaining Empires were Comoria, against which Valusia fought countless wars, Thule, Venulia, Kamelia, and the "Triple Federation" of Zarhanna, Farsun, and an unnamed country. Thuria was a minor kingdom that sought to rival Zarhanna.

Although Atlantis sank in the Great Cataclysm, several remnants of its population survived. Some fled to Antilla, a chain of seven large islands far out on the Western Ocean, while others preserved the tribe's stock in a colony on the mainland. These latter Atlanteans became ancestors to the Cimmerians of the Hyborian Age. A large colony of mainland Picts, allies of Valusia, survived the Great Cataclysm as well, though their insular kinmen were destroyed when the islands heaved up to become mountain peaks of the re-formed continent.

Some five hundred years after the Great Cataclysm, a second, Lesser Cataclysm further transformed the appearance of the world continents though not to the same extent as the earlier catastrophe.



"The thunder of drums and the great elephant-tusk horns"

BAMULA



The Bamulas are one of several large black tribes of fighting men who dwell in an area of rain forest among the Black Kingdoms southeast of Kush. These rival tribes — including the Bakalah and the Jihiji — wage war frequently in order to secure themselves water, land, and often slaves. The Bamulas are a ferocious race who clad themselves in leopard-skin and plumes and are said to be "suckled at the breast of war." The spear and the great hunting bow are their weapons, and Bamula warriors have been likened in battle to bloodmad panthers. Tribesmen are known as great hunters as well, stalking the dense jungle for leopard and elephant, wild boar and ape. The Bamulas live in villages of huts under leadership of the war chief, who sits on an ornate stool carved of ivory tusk. Priests and shamans use wooden idols, bloody rituals, and innate fear of the jungle's devil-gods in order to wield power of their own over the tribe. Occasions are known when the priests have unseated even a popular war chief by appealing to the superstitious dread of the people.

BARACHAN ISLES

The Barachan Isles, also known as Baracha and the Pirate Isles, are a tiny archipelago off the southwestern coast of Zingara infested by bands of sea-roving pirates loosely organized under the laws of the sea and in the name of the Red Brotherhood.

Most of these men are outlaws from Argos, though certainly sailors of other nationalities do join the brotherhood now and then. The Barachans swear allegiance to individual captains and live entirely by piracy, raiding shipping and harrying the Zingaran coast in particular, burning and looting and preying on people of the mainland. The cruelty of these pirates is legend, and fearful commonfolk actually believe that the Barachans eat women. Famed for their skill with the

cutlass and their superiority as longbowmen, the sea-dogs of Baracha are also renowned for their furious, headlong style of battling. The capital of the pirate empire, and the only settlement on the isles, is Tortage. Harbored amidst rocky cliffs, Tortage is a pirate port whose crooked, cobbled alleys are lined with sishouses, brothels, and inns. Here pirates of all flags meet in raucous, swashbuckling fellowship to count their booty and share wine, wenches, and song.

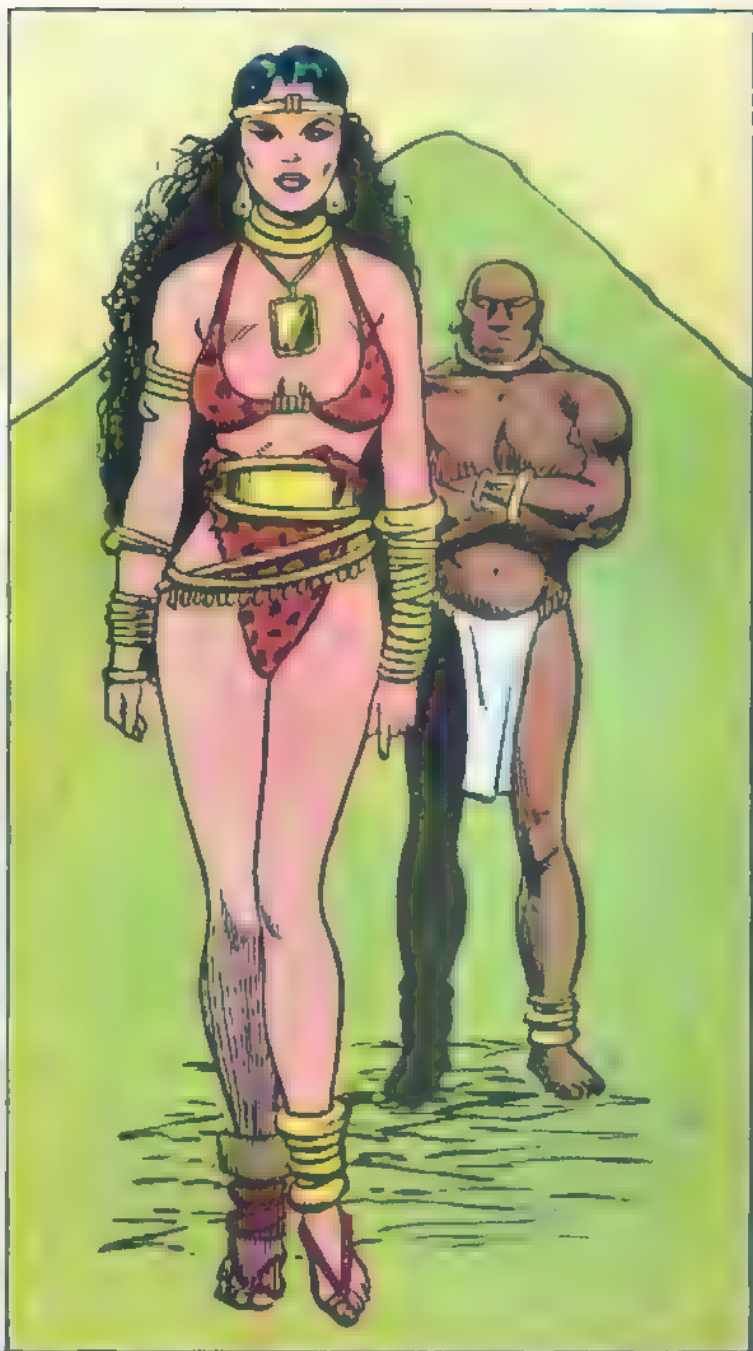


"To the Devil with empty seas!"

BÊLIT

"Queen of the Black Coast"

Fearsome she-tiger of the sea and fierce lover of Conan the Cimmerian, Bêlit was born a Shemite princess whose forebears were, for generations, kings in Asgalin, the great city-state of northern Shem. She was raised motherless by her affectionate father, the beloved King Airahasis, who taught his daughter the art of sailing, for he dearly loved the sea, and Bêlit soon learned to race her father's ship, the Tigress, better than any man. Nyaga, an exile from the Southern Isles and advisor to Airahasis, became her tutor. One night, Nini-Karrak, overweening brother of Airahasis, persuaded Stygian assassins into the palace to slay the king and his retainers so that he might seize the throne for himself. Bêlit was horrified witness to the bloody deed and was only saved from death herself by Nyaga's foresight to flee the city at once. They sailed from Shem in the ever-ready Tigress, down to the Southern Isles, Nyaga's homeland. During this voyage Bêlit nursed a bitter hatred in her heart, and she vowed vengeance against her uncle one day. Because of his reputation as a shaman, Nyaga was able to convince his native goddess islanders that Bêlit — whose name in Shemitish meant goddess — was the pale-skinned daughter of the death goddess, Derketo. Uzumi, chief of the Silver Isles, grudgingly allowed Bêlit and Nyaga to remain. Here Bêlit grew to maidenhood and learned the skills of spear and bow. But more than leopard and wild baboon, the game of the forest, she dreamed of hunting down the traitor Nini-Karrak. When Uzumi, who resented Bêlit's abilities and her acceptance by his people, refused to grant her warrior status unless she fought a horrible tribe of man-worms, his plan backfired, and the monsters slew Uzumi, whose replacement as chieftain was, by universal acclamation, Bêlit. In accepting the leadership, Bêlit declared that her island subjects would become pirates, conquering first the open sea, and then regaining Asgalin from her uncle. Indeed, over the next three years the Tigress ruled the southern waters of the Black Coast by blood and steel, and Bêlit made her notorious reputation as "the wildest she-devil unchanged." It was during this time that Bêlit's Black Corsairs captured Conan the Cimmerian on the waves. From the moment their eyes first met, Bêlit and Conan shared a ferocious, impassioned love like neither had ever known before, and they swore to travel together to the ends of the earth and the ends of the sea. The next three years were an orgy of love and laughter, pillaging, wandering, and heartbreath escapes, during which time Bêlit learned that her father had not died after all but had been exiled to Stygia. However, a rescue mission to that country ended in frustration and disappointment when she discovered that her father



was only recently executed to make space for new prisoners in the dungeons of Luxur. All the more embittered by the cruelty of fate, Bêlit at last returned to Asgalin where her vengeance against Nini-Karrak was finally fulfilled, but rather than accept the queenship of her native city, she relinquished her claim to the throne so that she might sail the waves forever with her dark lover, Conan. It was soon after that the Tigress made a fateful journey down the Zarkheba, River of Death, in southern Kush where Bêlit hoped to find a fabulous city to sack. Indeed, there WAS treasure hidden down the Zarkheba, but its site, the City of

the Winged One, was haunted, and Bêlit's crew saw Conan met his doom here, as did their queen and goddess, who was killed by a winged ape and hanged from the yardarm of the Tigress. Outraged and inconsolable, Conan stalked the jungle for the monster and slew it at last in hot vengeance with the aid of Bêlit, whose ghost came back from the abyss of Hell to be at her beloved's side. Afterwards, Conan lay Bêlit's body in state on a jewel-laden pyre and set the Tigress adrift across the ocean in flames. And so passed the Queen of the Black Coast.

Occupying the subcontinent south of Stygia, the Black Kingdoms comprise three belts of nations and tribes of varying sizes and complexity. Northernmost of these are Kush, the best known Darlar, Keeshan, and Punt. Darlar is inhabited largely by native janruhar tribes, with tied to the Keeshan hosts a mixed race of lighter-skinned nobility who rule a pure black population, all under the aegis of a king sitting the royal throne in Keeshia, the capital. Punt, ancient enemy of Keeshan, is a famous source of precious gold.

South of these, the second tier of nations includes the tribal kingdoms of the Black Coast, among these the Abombi and Buba, the nomadic tribes of the savannah such as the Bighama and Mhinda, hunters of ostrich and antelope, and the Janruhar tribes of the rain forest, the Gambia, Bawaka, and Jihji. More pastoral, cattle-herding nomads live east of the rain forest, while easternmost along the second tier is Zambakwa, the most important nation south of Kush. The name "Black Coast" has become general for all the coast of Kush and the lands as far south of it as the Southern Isles, or Isles of Silver, home of the Black Corsairs, dreaded pirates of the Stygian Sea. Kushite shores. Still, the Southern Isles is technically within the third and best of Black Kingdoms which occupy a land of dense jungles south of the Black Coast. Here are Kulala, a fledgling village kingdom on the Western Coast; Amazon, a nation of fierce women warriors and male slaves; the Mutamba tribe; Atala, an isolated, semi-mythical kingdom; and Kordele, a mysterious country east of Amazon of which little is known.

South of the Black Kingdoms lies largely uninhabited territory of desert void and volcano leading to the Beach at the Edge of the World, the extreme southern tip of the Hyborian world-continent, land's end, and site of the City of Yanoga, perhaps the very last stronghold of the few surviving members of the Elder Race, serpent-folk who flourished in the Pre-Cataclysmic Age of Atlantis.

*"The silence of shadowed jungles
... the scream of angry apes"*

BLACK KINGDOMS



BORDER KINGDOM



*"The wind in the
reeds
and misty bogs"*

A desolate wasteland of vaporous bog, muddy heather, and dreary plains, the Border Kingdom lies south of Aesgaard and Cimmaron, serving as buffer between the northern barbarians and civilized Nemedia and Brythunia below. The Great Salt Marsh is the most sprawling of the boglands found here, and is mist-shrouded, swampy, and is haunted by bats and vipers and wild dogs. Native to the region are the beast men, an angry, club-wielding primitives who in our rage, believed to be the degenerate, inbred spawn of generations of fugitive criminals and slaves. The beast-men subsist on frogs, crayfish, and wilder-dog meat. It is known that rebel nobles of the southern lands use the Border Kingdom as hideout, while many a hardy merchant has routed trade through here to avoid the highway taxes of Nemedia.

A Hybonian kingdom of city-states, Brythunia's terrain includes the Graeska Mountain highlands to the northeast and a fertile interior of prairies and forests. Its economy is primarily agricultural, peasants working the land of aristocratic lords who pride themselves on their independence from their king, a nominal head of state. Velbeza, Plunga, Charnina, and Potrabus are among the fortified cities that serve as headquarters for important nobles and diplomats in this loosely-knit kingdom. Despite longstanding attempts to establish itself as a world power, Brythunia falls inevitably under the shadow of its neighbors Nemedia and Aquilonia. The folk of Brythunia have the dubious honor of serving as traditional bulls of Hybonian legal humor, which paints Brythunian men as thickwitted oafs and their women as saucy and wiling wenches. The women of Brythunia are, in fact, much sought after by slave-traders for their beauty.

BRYTHUNIA



"Ah!
Brythunia's girls
with tousled
yellow
heads!"



BOSSONIA

"The very fringe of the civilized world"

A frontier province of Aquilonia extending the length of the country from Cimmaria in the North to Zingera in the south, Bossonia or the Bossonian Marches, is inhabited by a rude, rugged lot of rustic farmers, foresters and huntsmen. The Bossonians are stubborn defensive fighters whose sturdy courage and matchless skill in archery have enabled them well to protect their walled villages against both Pictish and Cimmarian attack. Bossonian bowmen are among the staunchest and most prized regiments in the royal army of Aquilonia.

CORINTHIA

"Goatherds piping melodies in her green hills"

A land of mountains and non-descript city states joined in loose alliance, Corinthia is a lesser Hyborian kingdom whose major claim to fame is that the Road of Kings passes through its central countryside. Its people practice self-sufficient farming and herding, and some small industry, including the production of wool and hand-crafted musical instruments, exists in several city-states. An infamous thieves' district, the Maze, a labyrinth of black alleys and sordid dens, attracts rogues, brawlers, and loose women from throughout the realm and beyond.



"A gloomier land never was — all of hills, darkly wooded . . ."

The birthplace of Conan, Cimmeria is a northern nation situated below Aesgaard, its sometime ally, and Vanaheim, its hereditary foe, though separated from both by the Eiglophen Mountains. Its people are barbarians, tall, strong, dark-haired, and light-eyed. Direct descendants of the folk of lost Atlantis, which vanished in the Great Cataclysm, and ancestors of the historical Galls, the Cimmerians live in tribes and are, for the most part, hunters and woodland foragers, unlike the more high-spirited barbarians of Northern Hyboria. Cimmerians are wont to be a moodier people, taking on the cast of their "skies nearly always gray" as a tribal ditty suggests. Their somberness of spirit, however, makes them no less ferocious as warriors in their battle-madness, and many a Gonderman of northern Aquilonia will not lie down to sleep before entreating Mithra to protect his home and loved ones "against the black-manes who descend like wolves from their fastness with torch and iron sword." The Cimmerians themselves trust in grim Crom of the High Mountain, chief of gods, though they are not given much to prayer. They believe rather that there is little to hope for here or hereafter and that the gods desire no worship, but are best left to their own indifference towards mortals. A rite of passage on the birth of boys does, however, exist in which Crom is besought to grant the infant man-child "power to strive and slay." After death, Cimmerians believe the soul wanders Crom's mountain — a cheerless realm of gray clouds, cold mists, and moaning winds — for all eternity.



CIMMERIA

CONAN

"Black-haired,
sullen-eyed,
sword in hand,
with gigantic
melancholies and
gigantic
mirth"



The greatest man legend of the Hyborian Age. Conan the Barbarian was born on a snowy, wind-swept battlefield in gloomy Cimmeria as his blacksmith father and his tribesmen beat back a horde of blood-lusting raiders out of Vanabheim. Like all Cimmerian boys, Conan was trained as a warrior from birth, but unlike his peers, Conan possessed a skill at arms and a strength of physique well beyond even the fiercest of his race. At age fifteen, after a rite of passage in the Cimmerian wastes where the young lad was seduced by Ursula the bear-priestess, Conan was permitted to accompany the elders of the tribe to Venarium, where the fierce Cimmerians soon destroyed an Aquilonian settlement. Conan, already six feet tall and one hundred eighty pounds of muscle — though he yet lacked full growth — was first to vault the stockade walls. After the Battle of Venarium, which made him a hero of the tribe, Conan joined a band of Aesir on raids into Vanabheim, then led a slave revolt of humans against the ape-men of Bruthum before being captured first by the Vunir then by Hyperborean slavers. But, iron-willed and fiercely determined, young Conan soon escaped and began to wander the Hyborian world. By the age of eighteen he had visited Zamora where he climbed the magical Tower of the Elephant in Aronjun and later encountered Jenna, a beautiful but crafty harlot of Shaduzar. From Zamora he traveled about, finally turning east to Turan where he entered the War of the Living Tamer and met Red Sonja of Myrkara for the first time. After an adventure in the jungles to the south, Conan re-enlisted in Turan's army and was dispatched to Khatra on a diplomatic mission. On his return, Conan left the army and traveled back to Zamora, where he met Red Sonja anew. After being abandoned by Sonja, Conan made a rare visit to Cimmeria, but soon grew bored. Turning south once more, he joined the mercenary Crimson

Company of Captain Mutilo. His wanderings brought him to Argos and a run in with the law from whom he fled by boat. His craft, however, was seized on the Western Ocean by the Black Corsairs of Bêlit the she-pirate. Bêlit and Conan fell in love, and the two sailed the Black Coast as lovers and plunderers for several years. It was during this period that Conan won for himself the native epithet "Amra the Lion." But after three years of romance and adventure, Bêlit was killed by a monster in the jungles of Kush, and Conan was left to wander melancholy and alone. He participated in tribal wars along the Black Coast and sold his sword elsewhere. An infrequent visit to Cimmeria followed, after which Conan fought in Koth then journeyed eastwards to roam with the Free Companions and then the Kozaki, whom he served as hetman for a while. A stint with the Vilayet pirates was followed by a captainship in Khauran, where Conan was crucified for his loyalty to the true queen. Rescued by outlaw Zuagirs, Conan, as was his wont, soon rose to the chieftainship. After leaving the Zuagir tribes, Conan visited Zamboula then rejoined the Kozaki against Turan. But the Kozaki lost, and Conan next fled to Iranistan then led a band of Alghut outlaws in the Himalayan Mountains before returning to mercenary service in Koth, Argos, Stygia, and Tombaku. A period of sea service followed among the Barsathan pirates and Zengarian buccanniers. Returning to Stygian service, Conan soon deserted for lack of battle and joined fellow ex-pirate Valera of the Red Brotherhood on a hair-raising adventure in the haunted city of Xuchotl. Parting with Valera after a brief amour, Conan went into service in Keshan and Punt and perhaps paid a last visit to Cimmeria before making the fateful move to become a frontier scout for Aquilonia in the Pictish wars.

Because of his frontier deeds, Conan's reputation soon preceded him, and he rose rapidly to the rank of general, in which capacity he defeated the Picts at the great Battle of Veltum. By then King Numedides of Aquilonia had grown jealous of his general's successes, so he pined Conan with drugged wine and threw him into the Iron Tower to await execution. But Count Trocero and Prospero arranged his escape, and Conan fled across the Pictish Wilderness where, after a bizarre adventure involving the Treasure of Treicanos, he was contacted by Trocero, Prospero, and Publius, who persuaded him to lead a revolt against the despotic King Numedides who was slowly growing insane. Conan the Liberator slew Numedides and usurped the throne to general acclamation. He withstood three attempts to wrest the crown from him, after which, sensing his kingdom relatively secure, he took to wife Zenobia, the daughter of Numedean petty nobility, who had earlier assisted him to retain his rule. As king, Conan was often at the center of many a sorcerous and political storm, ever landing off harm to his person or that of Zenobia. But a period of relative peace came to Aquilonia, and Conan and Zenobia enjoyed for a while the fruits of domestic and royal tranquility with their growing family of Prince Conn, Princess Radequind, and Prince Taurus, until sorcerous plots broke once more, and Conan was forced to confront the supreme Stygian wizard Thoth-Amon and baffle him to the death. Soon after, Zenobia died bearing their fourth child, and several years later, responding to a mysterious threat from the far west, Conan abdicated his throne and took to the Western Ocean on perhaps his last voyage, though the Chronicles do not record his death and offer little information of the days after his voyage to the western mainland of Mayapan. Prince Conn assumed his father's rule and reigned as King Conan II of Aquilonia.

**"He who denies the gods
is as blind as he who
trusts them too deeply"**

Among the barbarian Aesir and Vanir of
Northwind, Ymir the Frost Giant, lord of
slown and war was chief of all gods, while
individual tribes might have their own local
deities so long Ymir's domain was Vanaheim,
a snowy wasteland where still was none
earlier than a night. Ymir's daughter
Frigg, was said to have appeared to the
warriors as harbinger of their journey to her
father's realm. The Glenmeriake worshipped
a grim and savage god, Crom, Lord of the

in the kingdoms of Aquilonia, Argos, Cythra, Nemedia, and Zingara, south of Sarmatia and Scythia, and the worship was almost universal, rivaled here and there only by cults of small numbers such as that of Asura, Ibis, Inkhiz, and even, to some degree, the Stygian serpent-god, Set. Unlike the bearded-headed gods of the north, Mitra was a gentle god who ruled a heavenly host of saints and angels, and who preached mercy above vengeance. Mitra, too, was mankind's eternal judge, granting final reward in heaven or punishment in hell to each soul as merited by its deeds-in life.

other hand, never accepted Mithra but played host rather to any number of weird and mysterious cults and divinities. Most notorious of them was first the god of thieves, borrowed from the Rhemites of Shumir, and most horrible was the nameless epicler-god of Yazid, worshipped in the form of a giant terracotta sculpted in black stone. The land of Shem also worshipped a plethora of divine beings, most of them fertility gods and goddesses as befitting an agricultural people. Each city-state owned its own patron deity such as Bel, noted earlier, and Pileor the male sky-god, mate to the Earth-Mother; the latter appeared in several guises as Ashlorth, Derketo, and Ishar, to name, in particular, were worshipped in rich temples and

Among the Black Kingdom's Set head some away, but native gods such as Jula, Jhi, and Gwahu had large followings of their own, as did countless local demons and spirits. Yuran in the East held Erik and the Living Turin as holiest of gods, while Bala-Bura was known to have been a powerful man-ape-god. Farther east in Kossile, the cult of Yeur offered her bloodthirsty god strangled humans, while in Khital Yur-Bura's role seems even more complex. The easternmost nations of the world worshiped



HYPERBOREA



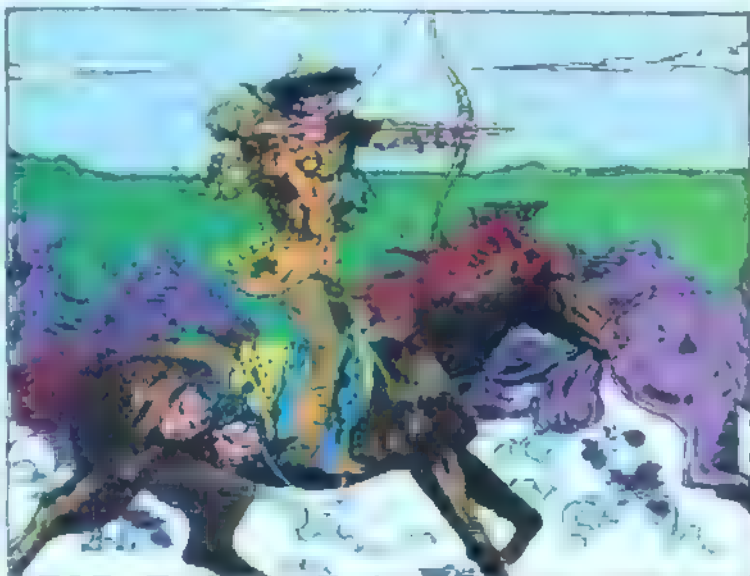
"The Gate of Hyperborea is the Gate of Death"

The first of the aboriginal Hyborian tribes to discover the use of stone in building, the Hyperboreans abandoned a primitive nomadic way of life to settle in huge walled dwellings of stone, consequently founding the very first, but most isolated, of the Hyborian Kingdoms, north of Brythunin and east of Aengard. The land of Hyperborea is wild and mountainous, gloomy and damp, its main pass ominously named Skull Gate; stray wolves, cave bears, reindeer, musk

oxen, and mammoths roam the bleak, barren and desolate hills. The common folk are lean and gaunt and of unnatural height — many as tall as seven feet — with pale skin, colorless hair, but eyes that sparkle cat-green. They are a superstitious lot who live as hermits in huts and hovels beyond the stone walls where they eke out meager livings from gardening the stubborn soil and herding small numbers of shaggy cattle and some reindeer. The ancient high-towered stone keeps themselves, such as Sigfons and Poholia, are now occupied by Berons and wizards, the latter the true political force in the country, terrorizing a fearful populace by means of black arts, assassination cults, and human sacrifice. The Wizards Guild, called the White Hand or Witchmen of Hyperborea, fanatically worships an old witch woman as priestess-queen and incarnation of the Goddess of Death. In her name, black-clad assassins, considered the deadliest fighters in the world, stalk the land like shadows, killing with sorcerous rods of wood and platinum that leave no mark upon the flesh. In addition to the wizards' clique, Hyperborea hosts several bands of hardy slave raiders who make repeated forays into Cimmaria to fill their slave-pens with barbarian muscle, whence the blood-haired of Cimmaria bar Hyperborea from time to time in memory.

A vast land of prairie, forest, and tundra east of the Vileyet Sea, Hyrkania is best known for its broad, barren steppes where horse-warrior masters of the powerful, double-curved bow, gallop the great treeless tracks of land, living in tribal clans and led by khans; these warriors often ride their sturdy steppe ponies on raids of plunder. (and some cynics would describe the chilling sight of these "lean horsemen in sheepskins and high fur caps, leaning their horses and looting their harbed arrows. One of the largest tribes of the steppes is that of the Kurgs; Nomads. Balkhara is a steppe city most famous for its breeding of rugged horses. Beyond the steppes, the scattered city-states of Hyrkania, such as Makkalat and Peh-Diehan, are oases of civilization, policed by soldiers in plumed helmets and gilded corselets, transferring guild-chased scimitars. These city-states are autonomously ruled by khans, though many are under control of the Tutarian Empire and others ever-threatened with such vassalage. Khonisin is a principal port on the Vileyet Sea, renowned for goldsmiths, while Balkharin is a caravan route town that boasts, "the best-made bows to bind even the broadest bellies." Erlik, the Yellow God of Death, and Tarm were attended by shaven-headed priests and worshipped by both tribesmen and city dwellers throughout Hyrkania.

"The Riders of the Steppes wear steel and silk and gold"

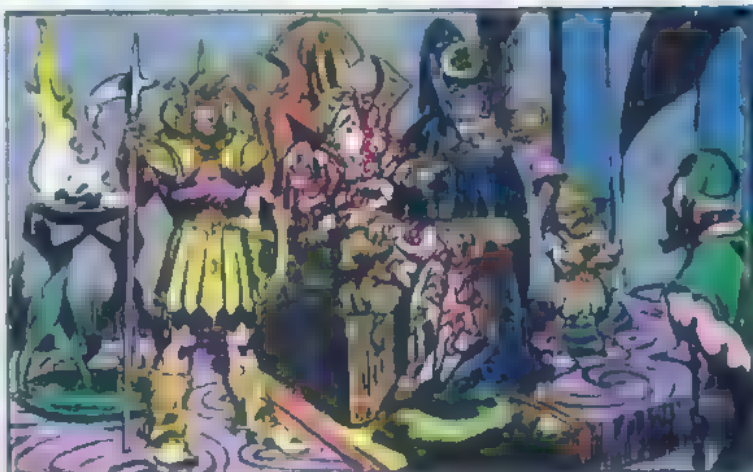


HYRKANIA

IRANISTAN

"Kings in gaudy silks and spired helmets"

An eastern nation south of the Vileyet Sea, Iranistan is one of Turan's strongest rivals, grown rich on trade with Vendhya and the Black Kingdoms. Its glittering capital Anshan presided over by a king as far famed for his cultivated court, its splendid woven carpets, and such exotic delicacies as the salted roe of sturgeon and the sweet pistache nut. The central deserts of Iranistan are the site of natural petroleum oil pools. The Ibers Mountains extend into Iranistan, and the Ibers hillmen who inhabit the towns in these mountains are nominally subject to the Iranistan government, though they are openly rebellious, owing allegiance to their own personal chiefs and overlords. Drustian, the "land of demons," is a wild and barren region of black rock in the southern Ibers where a ghoulish king once built Yanavdar, a haunted city. South of Iranistan in the Vendhyar Sea lie the islands of Pear enabled by the Gwardiri, a tribe of fishermen and mariners.



"Splendid, wise and civilized before the West was in its dawn"

KHITAI

A far eastern land whose people, institutions and civilization stretch back to Pre-Cataclysmic times, the kingdom of Khitai has become synonymous with ancient knowledge and unique (and exotic) scenery and exquisite craftsmanship. The authoritarian, well-eyed Khitaians boast of their cultural isolation from the cheng xi, the white-skinned foreigners of the western world, and they point with pride at the Great Wall built by their ancestors to shield their country from those outsiders who might survive a crossing of the Wuhuan Desert, an arid region unpeopled save for bands of nomads. Aside from desert, only the minor western Khitai kingdom of Kusan lies outside the Great Wall. Within the borders defended by the Wall, however, lie lush forests and bamboo jungles, rolling plains and bamboo hills and pagodes. Waterfowl and buffalo, leopards and tigers share the land with farmers and herdsmen whose main staple is rice and whose simple pleasures include eating lotus and smoking lotus-scented water-pipes. Great city-states are to be found to the north, the wealthiest and most important of these Khitai's capital, "purple-towered Peking, fairest city of the east," situated at the far end of the Great Caravan Route and a center of commerce where silks, drugs, and spices are manufactured along with gold, silver, jade and jeweled objects of art, as well as magicians' amulets and apparatus. A famed Dragon Gate, symbol of good luck, guards Peking. Shu-chen to the north and Run-ger to the south are her military and economic rivals, but neither of these city-states presents serious competition to the glittering capital. Khitai's soldiery, noted for its laminated armor, lacquered scabbards and flaming helmets, includes the famed giant sabermen, the most skilled in the east, and the Khitai archers, masters of the double-curved bow. South of Peking lies Khitai's Lost Jungle where rare poisonous blossoms of Black Lotus grow and gray apes dwell. Here the Priests of Yun once worshipped Yag-Koeha, a compassionate extra-terrestrial elephant being. Elsewhere in Khitai, there is no state religion; gods and demons are many, and rituals of human sacrifice are not uncommon.

"Wolves of the Steppes owning no law but their own"

KOZAKI

A ruffian horde of wild outlaws who dwell on the Turanian Steppes west of the Vilayet Sea, the Kozaki call themselves the Free People, though they acknowledge with grim humor the Hyrkanean-language epithet, "kozaki," meaning rogue or wastrel, hurled at them by the folk of Turan whose border outposts, coasts, and caravans are ceaseless targets of daring Kozaki raids of plunder. These raids are hit and run, as the Kozaki strike swiftly on horseback with sword and torch then retreat to the wilderness before their startled victims can retaliate. A fierce, proud people, the Kozaki are sons and grandsons of fugitive criminals, escaped slaves, deserting soldiers, and similar outcasts who fled to the Steppes some fifty years before Conan's time and settled among the aboriginal pastoral na-

tives there. Today they are divided into several bands, each serving its own leader, or helman, a position won by strength of sword-arm, not inheritance. The Kozaki enjoy a diet of wild vegetables, horse meat, and fermented mare's milk. Their native garb includes colorful head-scarfs, silken shirts and wide breeches, ~~leather~~ sashes, scimitars girdled to the hip, and gilt-~~leather~~ leather boots. They are outstanding horsemen and can live in the saddle for long periods of time, snatching an ~~instantaneous~~ nap on horseback or munching on raw meat, kept warm beneath the saddle, while still galloping apace. On occasion the Kozaki will present a double threat to Turan by joining forces with the pirates of the Vilayet Sea in order to harry the ports of the coast and beard the lion of Turan in its own den.



KOTH "A helmet of Koth and a hauberk of Koth, aye, the gods themselves might envy"

Despite its landlocked status — surrounded by Argos, Ophir, Cimmaria, and Shem — Koth is among the greatest commercial nations of the age, dominating much of the overland trade-route traffic, in particular the camel trains traveling through Shem northeastwards to the Hyborean kingdoms. Khazaran and Khoraja, small independent principalities along Koth's east and southeast borders, control many related paths of trade and are hence of great importance to the Kothic Empire. Because of the nature of the trade routes, Koth recognizes, as well, an economic interdependence with Shem. The land of Koth includes meadows in the

west and farms to the east, and at least one thousand miles of hills separating the Kothian Uplands from the pastoral lands of Shem. The Flaming Mountains, an impenetrable volcanic range, lie in these hills. Shamla Pass to the east is the most important break in the extensive Kothian Hills and Escarpment, though a second pass is thought to exist near Eruk in Shem. Capital of Koth is Khorshemish, "Queen of the South," a walled city of spires, minarets, mosques, markets and broad white streets. Here, between endless civil wars against rebel princes, the king retreats to his palaces, behind high walls amid lush gar-

dens, artificial streams, and flowing fountains. Here, too, is centered Koth's chief pride, her far-famed armor industry. Koth and her satellites are unique among the Hyborean kingdoms in having abandoned the worship of Mitra and embraced chiefly the Shemitish cult of the goddess Ishtar. Indeed, Kothic culture has been in many ways influenced by the more exotic and despotic traditions of Shem and Stygia as well, and in fact the armies of Koth include many a strong contingent of Shemitic bowmen and troops. The Gazaki of southern Koth were long ago driven from their homeland to the Southern Desert of Stygia for refusing to renounce their staunch belief in Mitra.

"Longing stirred in him and strange, luminous dreams roamed his soul"

KULL

Highest monarch of the pre-Cataclysmic Age, majestic in body and mind, thought and deed, Kull the Conqueror carved for himself a legendary kingship in ancient Valusia some 8,000 years before Conan the Cimmerian similarly strode stage center of the Hyborian world. A barbarian of pagan Atlantis by birth, orphaned in infancy, the child Kull roamed the woods, a hairless ape, with his adoptive family, the great striped cats of Tiger Valley, until one day tribesmen of the Sea Mountain folk found him and took him into their clan. Soon the boy outstripped all others in the spear-throw and in wrestling, but more significantly, his restless mind and visionary bent marked him as singularly different from the rest — irreverent at times, a sequester, a seeker, all perhaps the result of a sense of mystery thrust upon him by his early orphaning and the total ignorance of his own origin. From early childhood on a blood-busting and fearsome fighter, insited with the spirit of a tiger totem, Kull, too, was a dreamer haunted by the lure of civilization, who envisioned golden crowns and a glorious kingdom under his own sway. Thus, fiercely independent and self-willed, Kull was sooner or later bound to come into conflict with the narrow-mindedness and age-worn traditions of his clansmen. Indeed, one day when Kull, unable to free a girl about to be tortured for loving an outsider to the tribe, offered her instead a quick and merciful death by dagger, he was forced to flee his angered clansmen for having deprived them of their cruel sport. Perhaps it was to atone for this necessary yet painful deed that Kull in later life treated women with a chivalry and compassion beyond all reason while ever shying away from the role of lover himself. On his flight from Atlantis by sea, Kull was captured by Lemurian pirates who chained him to the oar as a galley slave. Two galling years later he overcame a pair of drunken guardsmen and escaped, diving overboard and swimming to the shore of Valusia where he soon joined a band of outlaws in the hill country until he

was caught and confined to the dungeons in the capital City of Wonders. Recognizing Kull as the magnificent physical specimen he was, the authorities sentenced him to King Borna's gladiatorial arenas where he became an overnight sensation and darling of the crowds. A Valusian nobleman, Count Murom born Bailin, recognized the young man's nobility of spirit and bought him his freedom and an eventual commission in the army. It was not long before Kull's natural leadership asserted itself and he rose swiftly to the rank of commander of the king's personal regiment, the Black Legion. It was then that Kull became unintentionally embroiled in a plot to assassinate the despot King Borna, a plot that led to Kull's seizing the Topaz Throne for himself, as he had ever dreamed, rather than awarding it to the envious claimant, the unctuous Kaanoub Baron of Blas. In his death-duel with Borna, Kull received a scar on his right cheek, a symbol of the violence by which he wrested the crown and by which he would ever have to hold onto it. Indeed, hard upon his first triumphal public procession, Kull, with the aid of Brule the Spear-slayer, Pictish ambassador to the court, uncovered the foul menace of the Elder Race of Serpent Men and delivered them the first of many defeats. Though dethroned for a period by the wizardry of the evil Thusea Doom, during which time Kull wandered and experienced several supernatural adventures, the Atlantean eventually returned to the City of Wonders and took back the throne. Here he ruled with the elderly Councilor Tu, Brule the Spear-slayer and the minstrel Ridondo, who had once opposed him, at his right hand. Count Murom born Bailin, Kuthoia the philosopher slave, and Kaanu the Pictish ancient, were also permanent fixtures of the king's court. Kull's later reign was a golden age sparked by the glorious king who divided his time between the expansion and defense of Valusia and the relentless pursuit of knowledge in a quest for the ultimate answers to the riddles of reality.



"The hot sun blazing down on ebony giants"



KUSH

Northmost and best known of the Black Kingdoms that lie below Stygia, the semicivilized nation of Kush has given its name to the entire southern portion of the world-continent, most likely because the Kushites proper were the first black men with whom the Hyborians made contact when Burethan pirates began to raid and trade along the Black Coast in the Western Ocean. Incidentally, this trade soon grew into a major source of materials for the Kushites who eagerly exchanged gold, silver, ivory, dried coconut, pearls and slaves for the beads, silk, sugar and brass-tipped wands shared by merchants of Argos and Zingara. A vast, flat grasslands stretches across Kush to the east, hosting grazing herds of zebra, antelope, buffalo, and fierce prides of lions. An occasional dwarf tree rises above the plain where nomadic hunters and tribes of herdsmen drink through the thick grass of the savanna. To the west

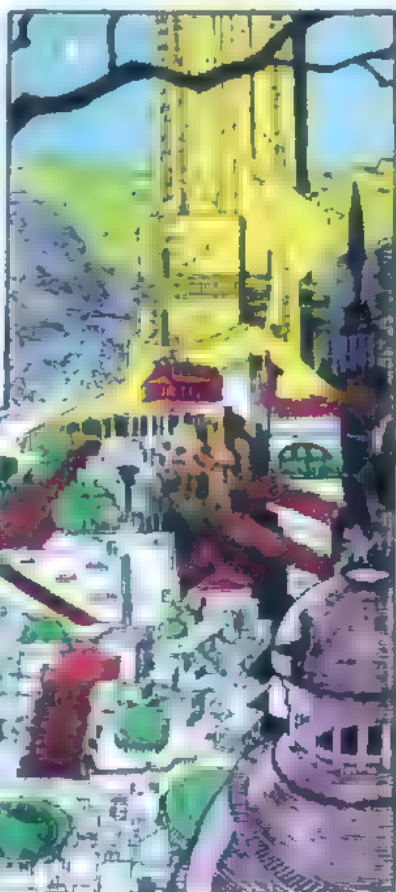
along the ocean shore dwell several slave tribes that raid inland and sell their native captives to off shore merchant ships of Argos, Zingara, and Shem. Kush is ruled by a narrow-featured, dusky-skinned, aristocratic caste, descendants of Stygian adventurers who once pushed southward to establish a city on a grassy plain at Meropé, now the capital of the kingdom. These natives live behind thick walls in the Inner City of Meropé, where they dwell in lavish palaces of teakwood and mahogany, and worship Set, the serpent god of Stygia. Beyond these walls lies the Outer City inhabited by the black-skinned native castes, despised and subjugated by the aristocracy. The brawny men and statuesque women of Kush live in thatched mud huts, and their marketplace economy consists of trade in pottery and hammered brass, iron spearheads, plantains, and banana beer. Tribute is exacted from them by the Black Spearman, backbone of the ruling caste's army. The lower castes swear by the snaky gods of Derketo, Queen of the Dead, and they worship at the temple of Juteah, contemptuously termed "the devil-devil house" by the rulers in Meropé. Of late the native population is growing ever more restless with the yoke of servitude, and the threat of a major uprising may yet soon spell doom for the ruling caste.

NEMEDIA

"Aye, great as Aquilonia . . . but ne'er so glorious"

Among the Hyborian kingdoms, Nemedia is second only to Aquilonia which lies farther east beyond a high range of mountains. Nemedia chafes to be ever in the shadow of rival Aquilonia, but despite ancient enmity and sporadic wars the two nations remain locked in an inconclusive military and diplomatic stalemate. Still, Nemedian civilization is of great antiquity and sophistication; her territory is secure, and she is well-situated geographically to fend off invasion. Indeed, her fate is deserved and true. Only rarely a portion of the ancient nation of Acheron, a wizard-run theocracy destroyed by invading Hyborian hordes three thousand years before the time of Conan. Nemedia may very well be the first of the Hyborian Kingdoms to have come into being, though some scholars attribute this distinction to Koth. From her Armenian ancestry Nemedia has received and nurtured a tradition of intellectual regularity, civility, and scholarship. The greatest historians and philosophers of the world hail from this realm, and their masterpiece of historiography, THE NEMEDIAN CHRONICLES, offers the reader valid and valuable material for an understanding of the Hyborian world and is the primary source for the original Saga of Conan, compiled during and immediately after his reign as King of Aquilonia. The liberal atmosphere engendered by academic inquiry also accounts for Nemedia's tolerance of a broad range of religious sects outside the state-endorsed worship of Mitra. Among these are the cult of Isis, the philosophical Skeptics, a following of Ishtar, and even devotees of Set, the serpent god of Stygia. Even so, all citizens tender allegiance to the king and are subject equally to the country's code of laws administered by Inquisitorial Councils and Courts of Justice which to their credit

nevertheless the innocent as often as they convict the guilty. Debtors are dealt with harshly, branded on the shoulder and sold as slaves, but slaves themselves are well protected by law. It is noteworthy that slavery is, in particular, more a civilized than barbarian practice of the age. Proud mounted knights sheathed in ring mail patrol the baronies and cities of the realm, offering protection to noble freemen and lowly serf alike. Capital of Nemedia is Belverus, a handsome city surrounded by rich croplands and orchards. Nemedia, at the junction of the Road of Kings and the southern caravan route, is her second greatest city, housing the famous museum and antique house known as Kallian Public's Temple. To the northwest lies a magic-haunted pine forest, the Labyrinth.





"Mines of diamond and mountains of gold"

OPHIR

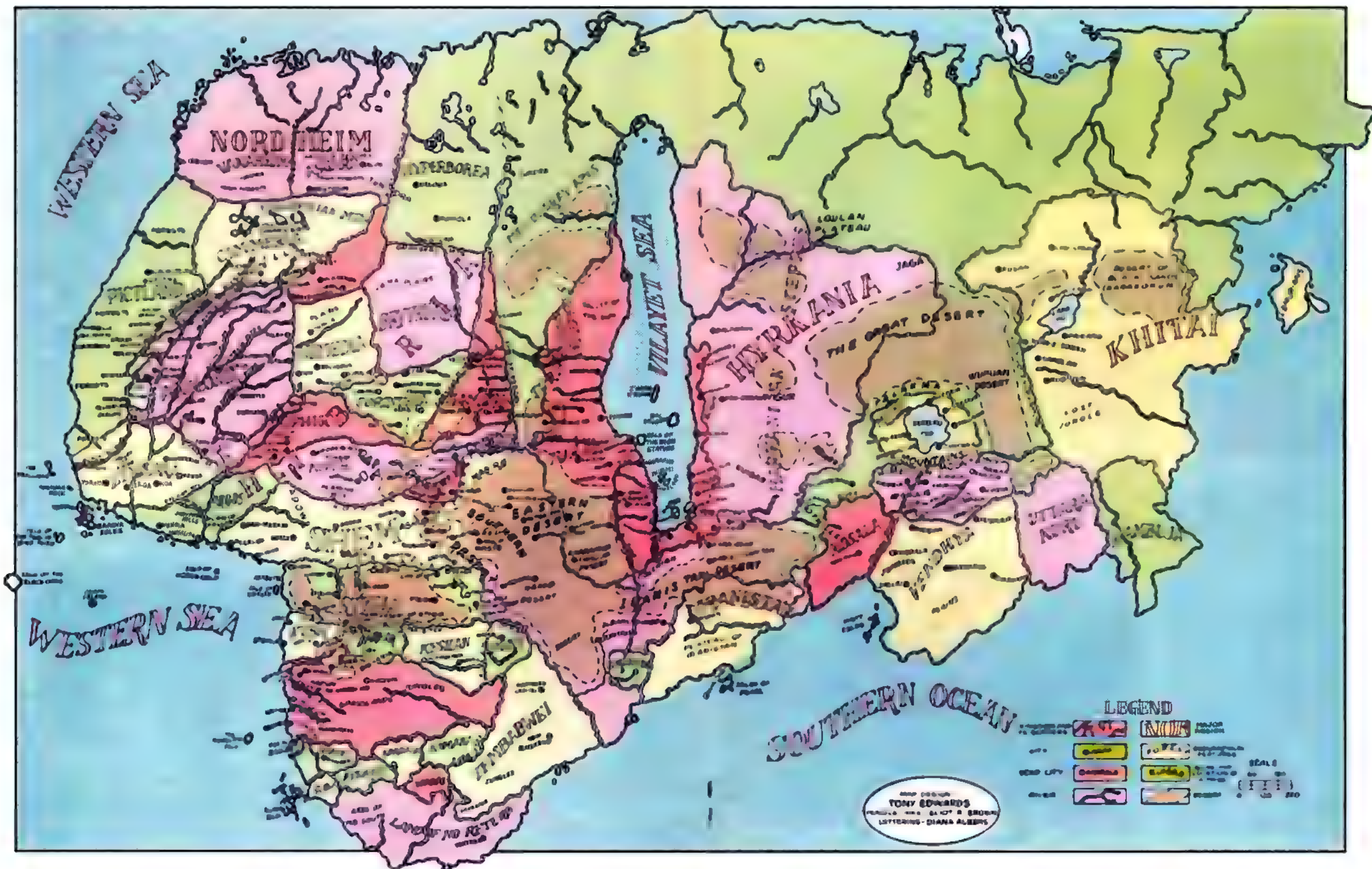
A fabulously prosperous Hyborian kingdom, Ophir lies south of the greater political powers Aquilonia and Nemedia, separated from the former by grassy meadowlands spreading to the Tybor River and from the latter by a frontier range of mountains that run southeastwards as well, down the border of Corinthia. Amidst these mountains are found the treasure mines of gold and gemstones that have made Ophir legendary for its wealth. Few spectacles are as extravagantly ostentatious as a parade of Ophirian knights bedecked in gleaming armor all of burnished gold, trailing gorgeous homespun scarlet cloaks behind them. There are several city-states such as Pergoria and Camollia scattered about the land, but the seat of state is Khorasia where the King of Ophir presides. The country is well-suited to protect its enviable riches, easily defensible on all fronts were sturdy portions of the Kothian border, but here soldiers guard the passes in strong keeps. All citizens of the land reap the benefits of its overfull treasury and are known for their generosity and generosity, as a well-worn Hyborian proverb suggests, "Make your companion a fellow of Ophir!"

"Ferocious Sea-Land tribes and Forest-Dwelling brothers"

Populated by the descendants of masti- and Picts who survived the destruction of the Pictish Isles during the Great Cataclysm of antiquity, Pictland, or the Pictish wilderness, is the westernmost region of the world-continent, bordered by the ocean to the west, Aquilonia to the east, Zingara to the south, and Vanathia to the north. The terrain of Pictland includes coastal beaches, forests, and howling wilderness. Each area of the country is inhabited by individual tribes or clans who name themselves after animal totems such as the Wildcat or Wolf Men or Raven. There is little unity among the clans, and intertribal warfare is common. The Sea-Land Picts are the most primitive, living in villages along the coast, scavenging the beaches for carcasses of walrus and whale, fishing the coastal waters but never venturing forth as seafarers. In fact, there are no ports to be found along the entire thirteen hundred mile coastline. Inland tribesmen, who live in huts of mud and wattle, share the forests with sabertooths, direwolves, wolves, elk, and bears. They are fearless hunters, and only the venomous wyllbi and steppe dragon are known to give them hesitation. Those tribes closest to civilization practice occasional trade with Aquilonian outposts or Zingaran ships, bartering antelope hides and walrus blubber for weapons and wine. Tribesmen are short and dark, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, with black eyes and hair. Among all the clans, women are relegated to drudge work while the men hunt, fish, and forage their chief weapons the bow and arrow, knife, and hatchet. They are fierce fighters and

headhunters who hold blood feuds and never take live captives except to torture them to death or offer them up as living sacrifices to their ancient gods, which include Jhahbel Seg, "whom once all living things worshipped," Gullish the gorilla god, the Children of Jhil, and a host of swamp demons and Pre-Cataclysmic spirits of the heathen forest and oozing mudflat. The shamans who act as priests to invoke these hoary beings and who practice powerful magic are often the true rulers of the tribes despite elected chieftains. The Wassermarkt, a western frontier of Aquilonia and source of much-desired furs and hides, lies between the Black and Thunder Rivers adjacent to the Pictish lands. The Picts hotly contest Aquilonian encroachment upon the area, and the frontier is site of occasional brutal warfare between native Picts and Aquilonian pioneers.





RED SONJA

*"All men's delight —
and no man's love"*

A flame-haired helcat who won herself the epithet 'she-devil with a sword,' Sonja was one of three children born in Hyrkania to a hard-working mother and a retired soldier father, Ivor, who earned his later living as a farmer and trapper. Envious of the training given her two brothers in the use of arms, Sonja would steal out at night to practice the sword on her own, though such skills were considered unnecessary, even unseemly for a girl. Nonetheless, Sonja did not shrink her more maidenly duties about the home, and she might indeed have gone on to wed responsibly and raise a family of her own, as most Hyrkavian country girls did, if not for a tragedy and trauma that befell her some time before her eighteenth year when a group of wandering mercenaries killed her parents and brothers for sport, before ravaging Sonja herself and leaving her to die in her homestead, which they set to the torch. Sonja escaped the fire, however, and fled the house, collapsing exhausted in the woods. Soon she awoke to a vision — out of a blue light a human shape appeared, embodying strength and beauty but neither male nor female. This androgynous being bore a sword and promised Sonja a warrior's strength to avenge the wrong done her and to make the world her own on condition that she vow never to love a man unless he first best her in fair combat. Sonja passionately consented and the vision touched her with its sword and vanished.

From that day forward, Sonja became a wanderer and self-sword of matchless prowess, encountering adventure and sorcery every bend of the road, until her fame as the 'she-devil of the Hyrkavian Steppes' reached the ears of King Ghannil of the Hyrkavian city-state of Pah-Dishah, who employed Sonja to steal for him a magical serpent-bark from another city-state, Makkaret. In Makkaret she met Conan of Cimmeria for the first time and duped him into lending his brawn to her mission, after which she eluded Conan and his amorous designs, and returned to Pah-Dishah with the prize bark. But King Ghannil had designs of his own on the crimson-tressed beauty and enslaved her in his harem, to his ultimate regret, for it was not long after that Sonja slew the king at his dalliance and fled Pah-Dishah with a rapacious price on her head. She traveled westward to Zamora's City of Thieves and an unexpected reunion with Conan. Together the two fought an undead wizard, then a gang of bounty hunters, and finally a pair of vampires. But soon Sonja again gave Conan the slip, valuing her independence above any developing relationship. From here Sonja's life became a series of wanderings — from the haunted Nemedian forest, Darkwood, to Conithia and Argos. During her days in the latter maritime nation, Sonja encountered Conan once more. This time with his then paramour, Bêlit. Later she was tempted by her own growing love for Sulumar, the exiled prince of the Argossean city Skranos, yet she remained steadfast to her vow and never took him as



a true lover, but left him with great sadness after having helped him regain his throne. Now she journeyed to Aquilonia, and later shared yet another sorcerous adventure with Conan in Shem, after which she returned alone to Hyrkania and paid a somber visit to the ruins of her parents' home. From there she wandered to the Vilekyst Sea,

thence to Nemedra where she allied herself with Galon and Achmal, an adventurer and a wizard, and continued on the road. In her later years she sought out Conan, then king of Aquilonia, and duped him into her service yet again before eluding him once more to wander forth into eternal legendry.



"Pastoral green plains and zikkurats gleaming white in the sun"

SHEM

A southern kingdom and one of the great commercial nations of the age, Shem is a land of contrasts — broad, fertile meadowlands to the west where the ocean laps the shores and despotic kings rule eldritch city-states in luxurious, sensual splendor within walled palaces; arid desert sands to the east, inhabited by lean nomads in camel's hair tents. The coastline has few harbors or port cities, symbolic of the fact that overland trade is the true lifeblood of the nation. Crisscrossing the land in all directions are the famed caravan routes, ever-traveled by camel trains and sirs of many bustling centers of trade such as the cities of Eruk and Nippur. The people of Shem are generally of medium height, broad shouldered and solid, with hooked noses, dark eyes, and blue-black hair. The men sport thick, curled beards and are famed as archers, selling their skill at bow to many a Hyborean army. Primarily, however, these folk are herdsmen and farmers — raising cattle in the lush meadows, sheep in the upland Libnun Hills, and harvesting grapes, pomegranates, dates, figs, almonds and cereal grains in

many regions of the country. Reserves of gold and copper are an economic boon, traded by the Shemites for mirrors, silk cloaks, shields, helmets, and swords brought by Argossean merchants. An industrious, clever people, they manufacture textiles and pottery in addition to practicing agriculture and herding. Kyros and Ghaza are areas famous for the quality of their wines, while Aubtana is a desert city known for steelmaking. Aagalon is the most important coastal city and capital of the region of Peishtia, a once splendid metropolis now fallen to decadence. Ancient Shushan, far to the east is Peishtia's counterpart in bygone glories. Each city-state administers its own brand of laws and there is incessant warfare between the dwellers of the cities

and the tribes of the desert. The Zuegr nomads of the Eastern Desert, in particular — among them the Duaki, Kharoya, and Qir-tala tribes — are aggressive raiders whose desert-bred horses are the finest in the world. These Zuegrs — dubbed desert hawks by themselves — "desert rats" by their foes — live in mobile tent camps, their men wearing the traditional white khilal and bearded kaffia, the women veiled. Individual tribes will often unite under one war chief. Tribesmen attack with curved knives, bows and arrows, and the caravans southwards and eastwards.

As for the Earth Mother goddesses whom they are responsible for the fertility of their land, herds, and families. Chief of these are Ashitroth, Derketo — or Derketa — and Ihtar Ptior, Adonis, and Bel of Shume are popular male gods. Ptior and Adonis sky-gods who are believed to mate with the Earth-Mother. Bel the patron of liars and thieves. Though the rival city-states are polytheistic, each has its own patron deity

SORCERY AND DEMONCRAFT

*"One who commands the spirits
commands the Earth"*



From a scientific point of view, the Hyoban Age was an era of relative darkness in places somewhat technically advanced but, overall, ignorant of the fundamentals of modern scientific thought and inquiry. Magic — both black and white — was the major force of the day, and power belonged to the mage or sorcerer whose command of magical knowledge and possession of charms, potions, gems, talismans, and bones extended that of his or her rivals. Or, conversely, gaining control of him and much-coveted sorcerous artifacts often required great wealth and strength of arms as well as cunning, hence the frequent alliance of wizards with rulers and potentates who, in exchange for a wizard's pledge of service could furnish the arms and wherewithal to defeat enemy necromancers and to appropriate necessary occult paraphernalia.

One such rare treasure sought by sorcerers throughout the world, was the iron-bound Book of Spirits, a master compendium of occult and arcane knowledge purportedly compiled by Vitellios the Blind. Within the pages of this forbidding and forbidden book lay spells and formulas to bring the dead to life, to control the elements, to summon extraterrestrial demons from the Outer Darkness, the Gulfs of Space, and the Pits of Hell in short, to wreak havoc on Earth. The ultimate goal of all black magic was omnipotence and immortality — to become like the gods and wield power to be master of mankind and emperor of all the world's nations. White magic, in the hands of the earthly few who could perform it, became basically a counterforce against dark sorcery intended to keep the world in harmony with the heavens.

Charm is an attempt to increase the quality and quantity of an magical energy magicians would band together in holy brotherhood though each individual mage undoubtedly nurtured the selfish dream one day to displace and rule over his less-deserving brethren. The White Hand of the North and Scarlet Circle of the Far East were examples of such wizards' guilds, but the most powerful and most unmercifully evil of all was the Black Ring, whose ancient rituals of unspeakable obscenity were performed worldwide though based in Stygia. Relying upon the principle that blood-reds great sorcery, the Sorcerers of the Ring preached and practiced human sacrifice as a means of summoning and controlling demons and the powers of darkness.

Among the most notorious wizards of the Age of Conan were Thoth-Ammes, Prince of the Black Ring; Nalohk the Veiled One, the Master of Yimshu; and the Four Seers of the Black Circle: Kallotun of ancient Acheron, Tiotha, and the vulture of Kall, Yeh-Cheng of Khutai, and Pra-Eun of Kambula. The very utterance of their names was believed to call down an evil eye upon the speaker, and tales of their shadowy deeds done in darkness brought a chill to the heart of the bravest soul.



TRANICOS "Death guards old Tranicos's treasure"

Bloody Tranicos was the greatest of the Barathan pirates who roamed the seas of the Hyborian world. At the height of his career of pillaging, he stormed the island castle of an exiled Stygian prince, Totheimen, slaughtered all the inhabitants, and made off with a fabulous treasure which Totheimen had brought into exile from his native city Khem. The tale of Tranicos' newly acquired booty spread far and wide, and soon every pirate, buccannier and corsair of the day dreamed of relieving the Barathan of his fortune. Fearing betrayal by his very own fleet, Tranicos fled northward with only one ship and anchored in a bay of Pictland whence he went ashore with eleven men and fell cruelly upon a Pictish village with bloody swords. He then chose a nearby cave and hid his treasure therein — the plunder of Khem, the jewels of Totheimen, golden coins and priceless gems, as well as his own iron-bound chests of silk and lace, garments, weapons, and ornaments. But a surviving Pictish shaman who had escaped the general slaughter invoked a sorcerous demon out of hell which strangled Tranicos and his men as they sat roasting in the cavern. To this day that demon guards the haunted Cave of Tranicos where, amidst a smoky haze and glimmering blue mist, the giant pirate and his eleven captives sit about an ebony table staring at their board, dead but not rotting, their jeweled wine goblets yet held in their grips. The chroniclers record that even Conan of Cimmeria failed to defeat the demon of Tranicos Cave.



TURAN "Splendor of the East and Mistress of the Vilayet"

Founded by Hyrkanian adventurers who migrated around the southern end of the Vilayet Sea to its western shores, and intensely proud of this Hyrkanian heritage, Turan is perhaps the greatest empire ever to rise in the ancient world of Hyboria, stretching westward over steppe and desert as far as Zamboula. Empire building is an active project of many a restless Turanian king, conquest and expansion are pursued with a zealot's fervor, and Turanian royalty have come to be known as "the mightiest monarchs in the world." Koth, Shem, Brythunia, and Zamora all pay tribute to the Empire of Turan, which has usurped many of the important caravan cities and routes of the day, while her numerous ports along the western shore of the Vilayet confirm Turan's epithet as "mistress of the inland sea." Ophir, Cormithia, Stygia, Hyperborea, and even mighty Nemedia at one time or another have suffered impetuous attacks from the east. Despite its own unparalleled wealth, greedy Turan has even attempted an unsuccessful invasion of Vendhya, ruthless and jealous of that kingdom's treasures.

The Vilayet Sea, two thousand miles in length and some three hundred miles wide, is indeed as the Turanians are fond of saying, "an Hyrkanian lake," dominated by the war galleys of Turan's navy which, under excuse of infringement upon the interests of the land of the Turanian Empire, can plunder any foreign vessel that sails her waters. Numerous islands dot the sea, mostly uninhabited, such as the Isle of Iron

Statues, Xapur — home of the ancient and extinct Dragonians, and the Zhurazi Archipelago, haunted by demons and lizard-gods. Along the western shore are located the major Turanian ports of Shapur, Maypur, Soltanapur, Khawarizm, and most important, Aghrapur. This latter, capital of the Empire, is probably the most glorious and towering city of the Age of Conan, extending from the sea to far inland. Here, on a crag overlooking the water, stands a huge and magnificent palace of endless rooms and perfumed gardens under the banner of the golden griffin. The vast throne room of Aghrapur is legendary — gold-worked entrance portals fifty feet in height, giant pillars of marble stretching beyond eyesight, lamps and candelabra enough to rival the sun in shining splendor. The Imperial Guards are a sight to behold in their scarlet mantles and white turbans sporting peacock feathers. Soldiers in the less elite corps dress in gold-embroidered helmets, white silk shirts, baggy trousers, and sleeveless silver mail, and they carry curved scimitars, ten-foot lances, and double-curved bows as their weapons.

On the eastern shores of the Vilayet are the ports of Khorusun, renowned for its goldsmiths, and Alhamdan, both of which service the caravan routes to the east. Also on the eastern shore was Onagru, a pirate stronghold. Along with the Kozak hordes, these pirates represent the major thorn in the Empire's side, and much time and effort are expended in attempts to suppress these bandits and pillagers. The southern coast

of the sea is inhabited by a non-Turanian people, the Yueshti, a pastoral farming and fishing folk who dwell in the Akim Valley Zamboula, a major trading post city in the Kharamin Desert, was conquered by Turan from Stygian invaders, and is now the westernmost outpost of the Empire. Here live a mixed stock of Stygians and Shemites under the rule of a satrap of Turan and served by black cannibal slaves from Dattar. Turan's markets are always filled with human trade goods, and here one may purchase slaves from Brythunia, Zamora, Ophir, Kush, Shem, and Stygia. The Turanian people are a self-assured lot, proud of their splendid nation, and supportive of their government's policies of imperialism. Other than Zamboula, where the lower classes bow to Hanuman, the obscene ape-god, the Living Tarm and Erik are the chief gods worshipped throughout the land.



VALERIA

*"Why won't men
let me live
a man's life?"*

A tall, lithe, golden-haired spitfire, Valeria left her home and peasant family in Aquilonia to seek fortune on the waves. She smuggled aboard a ship of Barathan pirates who had come to fence booty in the ports of Argos. When later discovered out at sea, the stowaway quickly proved herself superior in swordplay to all the men aboard — not one could disarm her. The pirates wisely welcomed the fiery-eyed young beauty among them, and through cunning use of her wits, leadership, and stunning good looks she soon commanded ships and men of her own.

Not long after, seafarers across the Western Ocean were celebrating the deeds of Valeria of the Red Brotherhood in song and ballad. When Conan saved a freebooter among the Barathans, he had occasion to meet the renowned pirateess and was smitten with her. She, however, numbered him but one of a long list of unwanted suitors at the time, and he pressed no suit. Another pirate, Red Ortho, did press to make Valeria his mistress later on. Torn, perhaps for the first time, between her fierce desire for independence and her growing attraction to Ortho, a handsome swashbuckler Valeria jumped ship and fled to the White Coast. She trekked south through Stygia to the Distant border where she found work as a soldier among the Free Companions of Captain Zarallo, one of many mercenary Free Companies of the Hyborian Age which fought for gold. By sheer coincidence, here in Sukthmat she met Conan again who had joined Zarallo's company some time before. Plagued by the advances of a lustful Stygian officer in her war camp, Valeria finally killed the man and fled, an outlaw, south into the land of the blacks. Conan, prompted by admiration and an instinct for her safety, followed and caught up to Valeria lost in the jungle. She greeted him with a mixture of self-assured disdain and grudging respect. The two soon found themselves fighting a huge dragon together and afterwards shared a hair-raising adventure in the haunted city of Xuchotl, occupied by feuding clans, a crawling monster, and a vampire.

After fleeing Xuchotl, Valeria was at last won over by Conan, and they had a brief amour. But the loss of the temple and the discovery of the vampire's power, leading them on good terms. Valeria left Conan behind in the Black Kingdoms and herself returned to the sea where she again took up her pirate's outlaws and added yet greater glory to her legend.



VANAHEIM "The wind whispering across the everlasting snows"



A far-northern nation, comprising the western portion of Norheim, Vanaheim is home of the red-haired, blue-eyed Vanir, or Vant, a warrior race for whom battle is a religious duty waged in the name of their god, the Frost Giant, Ymir Ymir is said to live in the mountains of northern Vanaheim. Vanir aggression is most evident in the continued state of war that exists on the borders it shares with Asgaard to the east and Cimmeric to the south. Cimmeric in particular endures endless raids from the predatory, fiery redbeards. When not fighting under the leadership of their king, Vanir tribesmen hunt and forage, comb their coastal beaches and fish out on the Western Ocean. They do not, however, venture far from home and are by no means a sea-faring people. Away from the moderate western coast, which is the most hospitable portion of the land, Vanaheim is a somber, hostile country of tundra, glacier, and icy mountains, in the words of its poets, "a place of bleak, pale sun and snow-covered plains."

VENARIUM "Aye, THERE was a battle . . ."

A frontier settlement of Aquilonia, now in ruins, Venarium was a fort-town originally built by Gundemen encroaching upon the southern part of Cimmeric in an attempt to push the Aquilonian border northward and colonize the marches. In doing so, the Gundemen destroyed several Cimmeric tribes, which had the unexpected result of uniting some forty other of the usually unruly and divided clans against the outlanders. In a rare instance of historical even-handedness, the subsequent Battle of Venarium is recorded in the Nemedian Chronicles from the perspectives of BOTH sides, the civilized Aquilonians and the barbarous tribesmen. This is due to the ironic fact that the adolescent Conan, who later became king of Aquilonia, was foremost of the native Cimmeric who stormed the Aquilonian fort. Below are excerpts from the chronicler's entries for the Battle of Venarium, the first from an eyewitness account of the Gundemen, the second from the "Song of Tolek of Cimmeric," an elder of Conan's clan:

"The barbarians swept out of the hills in a ravaging horde, without warning, and stormed Venarium, screeching blood-mad devils that swarmed over the walls with such fury none could stand before them. Men, women, and children were butchered. Venarium was reduced to a mass of charred ruins, as it is to this day. The Aquilonians were driven back across the marches and have never since tried to colonize the Cimmeric country."

Aye, there was a battle!
Howling and hacking!
An ocean of blood — Venarium!
And even then, the first to vault those
stockade walls

Was Conan.

He entered the fray an untired soldier —
Mighty of men like his blacksmith father —
Still, a lad of just fifteen snobs on his first
journey south.

But he marched that day from Venarium
A man among men . . .



A tropical country far to the east on the Southern Ocean, Vendhya is an ancient and wealthy kingdom famed for the treasures of its royalty, for the rare and magnificent Vendhyen tiger, and for the richness of its land which yields exotic fruits and flowers and an abundance of gold and precious gemstones. Vendhyan industry also produces textiles, especially silk, rare spices, drugs, perfumes, and cosmetics. Indeed, the nation prides itself on its self-sufficiency. The brown-skinned Vendhyans, whose native dress is turban and gauzy robe, are ruled by a Devi, or queen, who lives in the royal capital, Ayodhya, within a walled palace of lofty towers and scented gardens. Her throne room is resplendent with silken hangings, rich embroideries, golden ornaments, and precious stones, and her guards wear polished helmets, curved swords, and gold chased corselets. A noble caste of warriors, the Kahatriya, are the Devi's link to



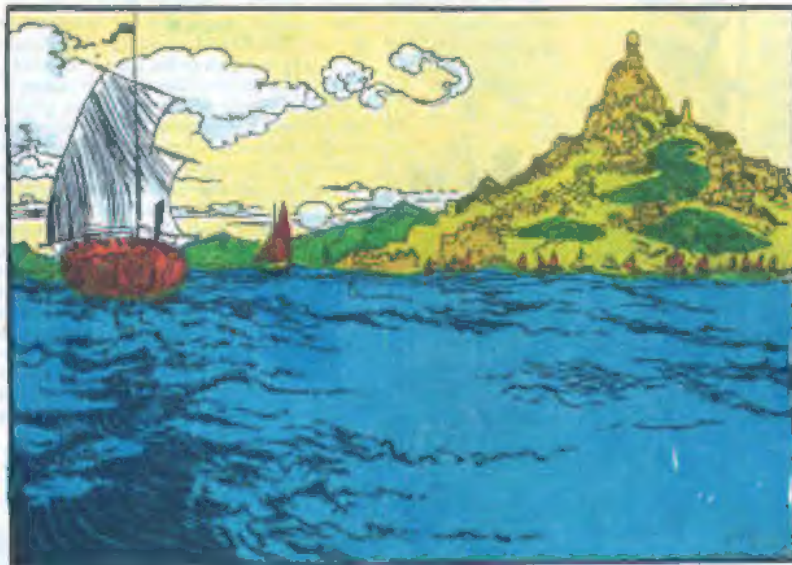
the common people and her true base of power. The Priests of Asura, the popular deity, are servants of the throne. The Misty Isles are a group of islands that belong to Vendhya where secret herbs are grown. Shrikma is a noted winemaking region, and Peshkhauri is one of many Vendhyan cities ruled by a governor in the Devi's name. Gureeshah is a valley in the northern foothills of the Himalian Mountains through which the main route from Vendhya to Hyrkaria passes. East of Vendhya lies Kambusa, a kingdom ruled by a god-king whose capital is jungle-girdled Angidox, home of the sacred elephant. Between Vendhya and Kambuja is mysterious Uttara Kuru, eyed with envy by many a Devi but not yet incorporated into the Vendhyan empire. West of Vendhya is Kosala, a dark land where the god Yajur is worshipped by ritual stranglings in the city of Yotapong.

VENDHYA

"Echoes of temple gongs in the hot, caressing night"



"Proud Zingara, land of chivalry" ZINGARA



A nation northeast of Argos on the Western Ocean, Zingara possesses a major shipping industry but has never overtaken the predominance of its southern neighbor as a commercial power on the seas. At one point, the country enlisted patriotic privateers, the Zingaran Freebooters, in an attempt to neutralize the merchant fleet of Argos, but the Freebooters soon turned renegade, and patriotism yielded to self-profit. Thus, faced with Argosesean supremacy and additional competition from Stygia, the Zingaran folk have of necessity developed agricultural and pastoral trades in addition to seafaring. Sugar plantations in the south, wine and leather manufacture, and a tin industry are important staples of the economy. Despite nominal allegiance to their king, who presides in the capital city of Kordava, the elegant princelings, bejeweled grandees, and silken-hosed dukes of Zingara frequently engage in petty rivalries resulting in endless civil wars. It is ironic that the renowned art of Zingaran swordsmanship is thus turned so often against its own people.

A strange and fabulous kingdom, Zamora was founded by the Zhemri, an ancient hybrid race, and the dark-skinned, dark-eyed Zamorians of the Hyborian Age are consequently of different blood from the western races of Brythunia, Nemedia, Aquilonia, and Koth. Perhaps it is for this blood-difference that the Zamorian folk are reputed to be peculiar and evil from birth, or perhaps it is because of the weird and immortal gods the people worship or the tolerance given vice to flourish throughout the realm. The two known deities of the Zamorians are the Spider-God worshipped at the stone idol in the city of Yezud, and Bel, the Shamitish god of thieves, patron of Arenjun. The ritual of the Spider-God seems to have derived from a natural abomination, a horrible species of giant black spiders native and unique to Zamora. Its worship includes human sacrifice and orgiastic rites, and Yezud is known as the City of the Spider-God. Arenjun, too, is named for its god and is called the City of Thieves. True to its epithet, the city can boast more cut-throats and outpurses than any similar den in the world. The Maul is the most lawless quarter of all Arenjun, and its crooked, shadowy alleys ring day and night with a carnival of murderers, thieves, braves, and bawds. Arenjun's Temple District houses shrines to myriad dark gods, and even the criminals of the Maul give these unholy quarters wide berth. The Tower of the Elephant was located here once. The capital of Zamora, however, is most notorious of all—Shadziz the City of Wickedness, known for the coarseness, quantity, and variety of its vices. Within its walls rules the king, an absolute despot in the clutches of sorcerous priests. The soldiers of Zamora wear plain steel caps and leather jerkins studded with bronze buttons, and carry bows, pikes, and shortwords. Larsha the Accursed is a ruined city east of Shadziz reputed to contain a treasure trove from Cataclysmic times. It is guarded by mummified giants, warriors of a past age.

ZAMORA



"Dark-haired women and towers of spider-haunted mystery"

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INDEX

Abombi	11	Dragon Gate	20	Lbrun Hills	26	Skull Gate	18
Achoron	23	Druistan	20	Ur	16	Southern Desert	21
Aesgaard	2, 11, 13, 19, 31	Duall	26	Lor	3	Southern Isles	10, 11
Aesir	2, 14, 15	Eastern Desert	16, 26	Lost Jungle	20	Stygia	4, 7, 11, 14, 16, 21, 23, 27, 28, 29, 30, 33
Alghul	2	Eiglophian Mountains	13	Luxur	28	Suta	11
Alghulistan	2, 14	Elder Race	8, 11, 22	Makkalei	19, 25	Sukhmet	28, 30
Alghurap	29	Eriks	16, 19, 29	Manans	3	Sultanepur	29
Alorn Valley	29	Eruk	21, 26	Mannanan	16	Suumaro	25
Alcemides	3	Farsun	8	Master of Yimaha	27	Tarantia	3
Amazon	11	Flaming Mountains	21	Matamba	11	Tarim	16, 19, 29
Amilus	3	Freebooters	33	Maypan	14	Tauran	3
Amra	14	Free Companions	14, 30	Maypur	29	Taurus	3, 14
Angkhor	32	Free People	21	Maze	13	Thandara	3
Anshan	20	Gatzai	2	Merco	23	Thoth-Amon	14, 27, 28
Antika	8	Gazali	21	Messantia	4	Thule	8
Anu	16	Gharinif	25	Mindanga	11	Thula Doom	22
Aquilonia	3, 4, 12, 16, 23, 24, 25, 30, 31, 33	Ghulistan	2	Misty Isles	32	Thunder River	24
Aronjun	14, 33	Grauskal Mountains	12	Mitro	3, 4, 16, 21, 23	Thurania	8
Argos	4, 9, 14, 16, 21, 23, 25, 30, 33	Great Caravan Route	20	Monigan	18	Thure	3
Arms and armor	5, 6, 7	Great Cataclysm	8, 13, 24	Murlo	14	Thuria	8
Asgalun	10	Great Salt Marsh	11	Nelohk	27	Tiger Valley	22
Asur	16, 32	Great Wall	20	Nobthu	28	Tigress	10
Atali	15	Gondrar	8	Nemedia	3, 4, 11, 16, 23, 24, 25, 29, 33	Tlaztians	26
Atalia	11	Gullah	16, 24	Nilus River	28	Tombatoj	14
Atania	1, 5, 11, 13	Gunderland	3, 31	Nim-Karak	10	Torn	3
Atzhakis	10	Gurashah	32	Nipgr	26	Tortage	9
Atulus	3	Gwadin	20	Nordhem	2, 13, 15, 16, 31	Tower of the Elephant	14, 33
Ayodhya	32	Gwarhur	16	Nuraka	23	Trancos	14, 29
Bakalah	9, 11	Haruman	16, 29	Nurnedikos	14	Tripe Federation	8
Bakharus	19	Howard, Robert E.	2, 14, 32	N'Yaga	10	Trocero	3, 14
Bakhr River	28	Hytonai	23	Oasis of Khajer	28	Trotha-Lanti	27
Bakhars	19	Hytonai Age	1, 8, 17-18, 23, 24, 25, 30, 31, 33	Oraguf	29	Tu	22
Bamula	9, 11	Hyperborea	2, 14, 15, 19, 29	Opnir	4, 16, 21, 24, 29	Turan	4, 14, 16, 19, 20, 21, 29
Barachan Isles	9	Hykane	14, 18, 25, 29, 32	Oriskonia	3	Turanian Steppes	21
Barachan Prates	4, 14, 23, 29, 30	Ibs	16, 23	Pah-Dahah	18, 25	Tybor River	24
Beach at Edge of World	11	Ibars Mountains	20	Palkang	20	Urala	14
Beast Men	11	Inirus	3	Pallantides	26	Ultara Kuru	32
Bel	16, 26, 33	Iranistan	14, 20	Pelashia	26	Uzum	10
Bell	10, 14, 25	Iron Tower	3, 14	Pergona	24	Valonia	14, 28, 30
Bolvarus	23	Ishar	16, 23, 26	Peshkharul	32	Vajusia	6, 22
Bigharma	23	Islands of Pearl	20	Pishishlands	5, 24	Vansheim	2, 13, 14, 24, 31
Black Circle	27	Iste of Iron Statues	29	Pictland	3, 14, 16, 24, 29	Vann	14, 15, 31
Black Coast	11, 14, 23	Isles of Sunset	8	Pirato Isles	8	Vastelos	27
Black Corsairs	10, 11, 14	Jenna	14	Pirogia	12	Vatitum	14
Black Dragons	11	Jhebbel Sag	16, 24	Poholoke	19	Venarium	14, 31
Black Kingdoms	4, 7, 9, 11, 16, 20, 23, 28, 30	Jil	16, 24	Pollain	3	Vendhya	20, 29, 32
Black Legion	3	Jinli	9, 11	Potrebio	12	Vendhyian Sea	20
Black Ping	27	Juliah	16, 23	Pra-Eun	27	Venula	8
Black River	24	Kaanuub	22	Pra-Cataclysmic Age	8, 11, 20, 22, 24	Vilayer Sea	14, 19, 20, 21, 25, 29
Black Spearman	23	Kambuya	32	Prospero	3, 14	Wazul	2
Book of Skelos	27	Kamela	8	Prior	16	Westernmark	3, 24
Bora Balin	22	Ka-nu	22	Publiis	3, 14	Western Ocean	4, 8, 14, 28, 30
Border Kingdom	11	Karabeh	3	Puri	11, 14	White Hand	19, 27
Bori	3, 16	Kelbeza	12	Qirtala	26	Witchman	19
Borna	22	Keshan	11, 14	Radegund	3, 14	Wizards' Guild	19, 27
Bosonia	3, 4, 12	Keshia	11	Ramen	3	Wuhuan Desert	20
Bosontian Marches	3, 4, 12	Kharahun Desert	29	Red Brotherhood	9, 14, 30	Xaltotun	27
Brule	22	Kharoya	26	Red Ortho	30	Xuchoti	14, 28, 30
Bruthem	14	Khauran	14, 16, 21	Red Sonja	14, 25	Yag-Kosha	20
Brythunia	11, 12, 19, 29, 33	Khawarizm	29	Rhamdan	26	Yah Chiang	27
Cameroon Desert	8	Khemi	28, 29	Ridondo	22	Yayur	16, 32
Carnolia	24	Kheshatta	28	Road of Kings	3, 4, 13, 23	Yanader	20
Chamia	12	Khitai	7, 14, 16, 20	Ruo-Gen	20	Yenoga	11
Cimmeria	2, 3, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 21, 31	Khoraja	15, 21	Scarlet Circle	27	Yezud	16, 33
City of Wonders	8, 22	Khorale	24	Scholina	3	Ymir	2, 15, 31
Commonie	8	Khoros River	3	Sea-Mountain Folk	22	Yop	16
Conan	3, 4, 10, 13, 14, 22, 23, 25, 26, 29, 30	Khorshemish	21	Ser	16, 23, 28	Yotapong	32
Conawaga	3	Khorusaur	19, 29	Seven Empires	8	Yutashi	29
Conn	3, 14	Khorakzal	2	Shadizar	14, 33	Yun	16, 29
Corinthia	13, 16, 24, 25, 29	Kordala	11	Shahpur	21	Zaigaran Hills	6
Couthen	3	Kordava	32	Shamla Pass	29	Zamboula	14, 16, 29
Crimson Company	14	Kosala	16, 28, 32	Shem	3, 10, 16, 21, 23, 25, 29, 28, 29	Zamora	3, 14, 15, 25, 29, 33
Crom	13, 15, 16	Koth	14, 21, 23, 29, 33	Shirekoma	32	Zaralo	30
Dagonians	29	Kozaki	14, 21, 29	Shu-Chen	30	Zaighaana	6
Darfar	11, 28, 30	Kuagir	19	Shumir	16	Zakhaba	10
Darkwood	23, 25	Kutalo	11	Shushan	36	Zembabwel	11
Derkota	10, 16, 23, 26	Kull	22	Sigtona	19	Zenobia	3, 14
Deathous	3	Kusan	20	Silver Isles	10, 11	Zhaibari	2
		Kush	4, 9, 11, 14, 23, 30	Skeptics	23	Zhurazi Archipelago	29
		Lake Zuad	28	Skranos	25	Zingara	4, 9, 12, 14, 16, 23, 24, 33
		Lemuria	8			Zuagir	14, 16, 26
		Lesser Cataclysm	8				